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OFFICIAL REPORT
(HANSARD)

Tuesday, November 25, 2014

—

Speaker: The Honourable Andrew Scheer

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HOUSE OF COMMONS

Tuesday, November 25, 2014

The House met at 10 a.m.

Prayers

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

• (1005)

[*English*]

AUDITOR GENERAL OF CANADA

The Deputy Speaker: I have the honour to lay upon the table, in both official languages, the fall 2014 report of the Auditor General of Canada.

[*Translation*]

Pursuant to Standing Order 108(3)(g), this document is deemed permanently referred to the Standing Committee on Public Accounts.

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[*English*]

COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

HEALTH

Mr. Ben Lobb (Huron—Bruce, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the seventh report of the Standing Committee on Health in relation to a study of the supplementary estimates (B) for the fiscal year 2014-15.

* * *

[*Translation*]

INTERN PROTECTION ACT

Ms. Laurin Liu (Rivière-des-Mille-Îles, NDP) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-636, An Act to amend the Canada Labour Code (unpaid training).

She said: Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to be introducing the intern protection act.

After consulting with experts and stakeholders, we made some changes to this bill. I would like to thank the family of Andy Ferguson for their help in developing this bill.

Basically, this bill would ensure that paid positions cannot be turned into unpaid internships. The bill will also offer basic

protections for unpaid interns, such as protection against sexual harassment, protection of hours of work and protection against dangerous work.

I encourage all of my colleagues to support this bill, which is urgently needed and very important for our young workers.

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

* * *

[*English*]

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, there have been consultations among the parties, and I believe you will find unanimous consent for the following motion:

That, notwithstanding any Standing Order or usual practice of the House,

(a) any recorded division deferred, or deemed deferred, to Tuesday, December 2, 2014, Tuesday, December 9, 2014, and Wednesday, December 10, 2014, shall be taken up at the conclusion of oral questions, provided that there shall be no extension of the time provided for Government Orders pursuant to Standing Order 45(7.1); and

(b) any recorded division demanded in respect of a debatable motion, other than an item of Private Members' Business, on the days listed in paragraph (a) shall be deemed deferred to the conclusion of oral questions on the next sitting day which is not a Friday.

The Deputy Speaker: Does the hon. government House leader have the unanimous consent of the House to propose the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

(Motion agreed to)

* * *

PETITIONS

RAIL TRANSPORTATION

Mrs. Carol Hughes (Algoma—Manitoulin—Kapusksing, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have tabled many of these petitions in the House before, and I am pleased to table these on behalf of the residents of Wawa, Ontario.

Government Orders

The petition is with respect to the Algoma Central Railway passenger rail and the decisions that the federal government made without consulting broad stakeholders, as well as the impact that this would have on businesses, homes, and communities along that route, and the severe impact it would have on the economy, health and safety, and accessibility of people in those areas. The issue is with respect to services. The government did finally come back to the table and make a reinvestment, but only for one year.

The petitioners are calling on the federal government to allow the continued operation of Algoma Central Railway. There are no passenger railways that function without the support of the government.

ROUGE NATIONAL PARK

Ms. Rathika Sitsabaiesan (Scarborough—Rouge River, NDP): Mr. Speaker, today I rise to present petitions on behalf of hundreds of people in the greater Toronto area who have submitted petitions on the creation of a Rouge national park, which includes 100 square kilometres of public land assembly that surrounds the Rouge River and Duffins Creek watersheds in Toronto, Markham, and Pickering. This is publicly owned provincial, federal, and municipal lands that are predominately within the provincial greenbelts and natural heritage system.

The petitioners are asking for us to respect the fact that the lands are the ancestral home of the Mississauga, Huron-Wendat, and Seneca first nations, and to include their sacred burial grounds and village sites.

The petitioners are asking for the legislation that would create a Rouge national park that is respectful of the history over the last many decades of protection, and creation of Rouge park in my constituency and within the greater Toronto area.

ANAPHYLAXIS

Mr. Craig Scott (Toronto—Danforth, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am privileged to present a petition entitled “Enact a Policy to Reduce the Risk for Anaphylactic Passengers”. It follows from a May 2013 motion in this House that was unanimously supported. It talks about anaphylaxis being a serious concern for an increasing number of Canadians, indeed 2.5 million Canadians. The specific concern of the petitioners is improved transportation safety for that group of Canadians.

● (1010)

YOUTH EMPLOYMENT

Mr. Andrew Cash (Davenport, NDP): Mr. Speaker, about half of all workers in the GTA cannot access a full-time permanent job. This is particularly difficult for young workers. Currently, the unemployment rate for young workers is about twice the national average. Many are working precarious jobs, and many still are working as unpaid interns.

There is a patchwork of rules across the country. Some provinces have strong regulations and others have none. For federally regulated industries, there are absolutely no rules governing the use and legality of unpaid internships.

This petition, signed by people from all over my riding, in fact, all over the city of Toronto, calls upon the government to enact a

national urban workers strategy which would, among other things, strengthen labour practices and standards to prevent the exploitation of workers and unpaid interns.

CITIZENSHIP AND IMMIGRATION

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, today I table a petition with respect to Canada's super visa, for individuals who want to be able to come to Canada as a tourist or to visit with family and friends. The petitioners would like to see it become more accessible and affordable.

It is a petition that I truly support and think that the House should adopt.

* * *

QUESTIONS ON THE ORDER PAPER

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

The Deputy Speaker: Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[English]

ROUGE NATIONAL URBAN PARK ACT

The House proceeded to the consideration of Bill C-40, An Act respecting the Rouge National Urban Park, as reported (without amendment) from the committee.

The Deputy Speaker: There being no motions at report stage on this bill, the House will now proceed, without debate, to the putting of the question of the motion to concur in the bill at report stage.

Hon. Bal Gosal (for the Minister of the Environment) moved that the bill be concurred in.

The Deputy Speaker: Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

The Deputy Speaker: All those in favour of the motion will please say yea.

Some hon. members: Yea.

The Deputy Speaker: All those opposed will please say nay.

Some hon. members: Nay.

The Deputy Speaker: In my opinion, the yeas have it.

And five or more members having risen:

The Deputy Speaker: Call in the members.

● (1050)

(The House divided on the motion, which was agreed to on the following division:)

(Division No. 286)

YEAS

Members

Adams	Adler
Albas	Albrecht
Allen (Tobique—Mactaquac)	Allison
Ambler	Ambrose
Anderson	Armstrong
Aspin	Baird
Barlow	Bateman
Benoit	Bergen
Bernier	Bezan
Blaney	Block
Boughen	Braid
Breitkreuz	Brown (Leeds—Grenville)
Brown (Newmarket—Aurora)	Butt
Calandra	Cannan
Carmichael	Carrie
Chisu	Chong
Clarke	Clement
Crockatt	Daniel
Davidson	Dechert
Devolin	Dreeshen
Duncan (Vancouver Island North)	Dykstra
Falk	Fast
Findlay (Delta—Richmond East)	Finley (Haldimand—Norfolk)
Galipeau	Gill
Glover	Goguen
Goldring	Goodyear
Gosal	Gourde
Grewal	Harper
Hawn	Hayes
Hiebert	Hoback
Holder	James
Kamp (Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge—Mission)	Keddy (South Shore—St. Margaret's)
Kenney (Calgary Southeast)	Kent
Kerr	Komarnicki
Kramp (Prince Edward—Hastings)	Lake
Lauzon	Lebel
Leef	Leitch
Lemieux	Leung
Lizon	Lobb
Lukiwski	Lunney
MacKay (Central Nova)	MacKenzie
Maguire	Mayes
McColeman	McLeod
Menegakis	Miller
Moore (Port Moody—Westwood—Port Coquitlam)	
Moore (Fundy Royal)	Norlock
Nicholson	O'Connor
Obhrai	O'Neill Gordon
Oliver	Payne
O'Toole	Preston
Poilievre	Rempel
Rajotte	Rickford
Richards	Saxton
Ritz	Seeback
Schellenberger	Shipley
Shea	Smith
Shory	Sorenson
Sopuck	Strahl
Stanton	Tilson
Sweet	Trost
Toet	Truppe
Trottier	Valcourt
Uppal	Van Loan
Van Kesteren	Warawa
Wallace	Weston (West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast—Sea to Sky Country)
Warkentin	Wilks
Young (Oakville)	Wong
Yurdiga	Yelich
	Young (Vancouver South)
	Zimmer — 140

NAYS

Members

Allen (Welland)	Andrews
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Government Orders

Angus	Aubin
Bélanger	Bennett
Benskin	Bevington
Blanchette	Boivin
Borg	Boutin-Sweet
Brahmi	Brisson
Brosseau	Byrne
Caron	Casey
Cash	Charlton
Chicoine	Chisholm
Choquette	Christopherson
Cleary	Comartin
Côté	Cotler
Crowder	Cullen
Davies (Vancouver Kingsway)	Day
Dewar	Dion
Dionne Labelle	Dusseau
Easter	Eyking
Foote	Freeland
Freeman	Garneau
Garrison	Genest
Genest-Jourdain	Giguère
Godin	Goodale
Groguhé	Hsu
Hughes	Hyer
Jones	Julian
Lamoureux	Lapointe
Laverdière	LeBlanc (Beauséjour)
LeBlanc (LaSalle—Émard)	Leslie
Liu	MacAulay
Mai	Marston
Mathysen	May
McGuinty	McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood)
Morin (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine)	Morin (Laurentides—Labelle)
Nantel	Nash
Nicholls	Papillon
Péclet	Perreault
Pilon	Plamondon
Rafferty	Rankin
Regan	Rousseau
Saganash	Sandhu
Scarpaleggia	Scott
Sellah	Sgro
Simms (Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Windsor)	
Sitsabaesan	
St-Denis	Stewart
Sullivan	Thibeault
Tremblay	Trudeau
Turmel	Valeriot
Vaughan — 99	

PAIRED

Nil

The Speaker: I declare the motion carried.

When shall the bill be read the third time? By leave, now?

Some hon. members: Agreed.**Hon. Bal Gosal (for the Minister of the Environment)** moved that the bill be read the third time and passed.**Hon. Peter Kent (Thornhill, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, it is an honour and a pleasure to rise in the House today on this historic occasion, the third reading of the Rouge national urban park act.

Before I get to the good news, I find I must speak to the fact that the past hour has been wasted by another example of legislative vandalism by the official opposition, the NDP. I am told that it might have been a mistake in signals and I suppose we have to consider that, but I think this is just the latest in a long-running example, both in committee and here in debate in this House, where the NDP has obstructed, undercut, and taken part in legislative vandalism.

Government Orders

I will now go to the good news. The Government of Canada is proudly embarking on a Canadian first, a new kind of national protected area within Canada's largest metropolitan area. The creation of Rouge national urban park is a proud and historic achievement not only for all the residents of the greater Toronto area and all of Ontario, but also for Canadians right from coast to coast. Rouge national urban park, which is a Canadian first, builds on an incredible legacy of pioneering and innovative conservation work undertaken by Parks Canada for over a century.

In 2011, the year of Parks Canada's centennial, the agency was awarded the Gift to the Earth award by Mr. Gerald Butts, who was then of the World Wildlife Federation International. As colleagues now know, he is working on a recovery effort for another endangered species, but that is another story.

The creation of Rouge national urban park is an immensely proud occasion for all Ontarians and Canadians. It helps to position Canada at the forefront of the world's emerging urban protected areas movement. Rouge national urban park would be one of the planet's largest and most significant urban protected areas, providing a sanctuary of protected and restored forests, marshes, wetlands, farmlands, and centuries-old cultural landscapes alongside the greater Toronto area's rich cultural diversity.

This bill allows more land to be added over time, which would eventually make this wonderful park 25% larger than the current protected area, making it 13 times larger than Vancouver's Stanley Park—no offence intended to my colleagues from British Columbia—16 times larger than New York City's Central Park, and 33 times larger than London's Hyde Park.

Rouge national urban park would be a shining example of the very best of Canada, because it brings together and enshrines in legislation the protection and the celebration of three things that define us as Canadian and speak to the very essence of Canada—our nation's national, cultural, and agricultural heritage.

This bill integrates the protection of nature, culture, and agriculture in a new and bold approach, but I want to make it clear that the Rouge national urban park would provide us with a strong legislative framework to meet, to exceed, and to expand upon the protections and mandate currently in place to protect and manage smaller portions of the Rouge by a variety of public landowners.

Protecting nature, culture, and agriculture together does not mean that protection of natural resources is somehow diminished, as some have implied, nor does it mean that there are no priorities or that the Rouge is trying to be everything to everyone. That is simply not true. Those who suggest such scenarios do not understand the Rouge Park's urban setting, the needs of its landscape mosaic, or the opportunity to demonstrate true leadership internationally.

● (1055)

Having been asked by the Rouge Park Alliance, which for years had managed the lands currently called the Rouge Park, to find a solution to the governance and conflicts that were making park management impossible, Parks Canada began consulting with thousands of Canadians and with hundreds of groups and organizations representing stakeholders, communities, non-governmental organizations, and governments.

Through the process, the government determined that an integrated approach was the most appropriate for the Rouge. It is an approach that has three very clear interconnected priorities when it comes to protection: nature, culture, and agriculture. This model is what Canadians and the Rouge Park Alliance, the formerly provincially appointed managing authority of Rouge Park, have asked for. This approach would allow us to make the very best conservation gains across the entire park landscape in ways that would allow for the Rouge's natural, cultural, and agricultural resources to receive the highest level of protection now and far into the future.

The Government of Canada's integrative and inclusive approach will allow us to succeed where the previous disparate park authorities and regimes have not before. While there has certainly been some wonderful work done to protect the Rouge over the last 20 years, there have also been divergent and sometimes conflicting interests in the lands that make up the future Rouge national urban park. During that time, no single legal regime governed these lands, and at times the voices of many groups and residents were not reflected in policy development and park management. Nature, culture, agriculture, and visitor connection opportunities were often seen as competing rather than complementary priorities.

When the bill came to committee earlier this month, one of the witnesses we heard from was the Hon. Pauline Browes, the director of Waterfront Regeneration Trust Corporation and a former federal minister of state for the environment. Mrs. Browes gave the committee some of the history of the creation of the Rouge Park. She stated:

Every municipality in the Rouge watershed passed a motion endorsing the proposal, as well as the TRCA, to urge the federal government to establish a national park. The Government of Ontario publicly and enthusiastically supported that recommendation. The community supported the recommendation.

Ms. Browes continued:

This legislation is before you. Parks Canada, a heralded organization of experience and very competent individuals, has been assigned the responsibility of the permanent protection and preservation of the natural, cultural, and agricultural aspects of the Rouge national urban park. In particular I would like you to look at clauses 4 and 6. I have read the debates that each of you have made in the House of Commons...but the language of these two clauses is clear and self-explanatory. These clauses will allow the minister to make the decisions based on the identified purposes for which the park is being created and the factors which must be taken into consideration. Pitting the elements against each other by putting one as a priority... would really create conflict. I would ask you to consider the natural, cultural, and agricultural aspects, and I mean the cultural aspects with the aboriginal issues and the archaeological issues. When I was a member we did some archaeological digs in the park and we found a 17th century French coin. There's a lot of cultural heritage within this park.

With Bill C-40, Parks Canada, through the Minister of the Environment, would be given the responsibility to bring all groups together and work for the betterment of Rouge national urban park to ensure a broad range of perspectives is heard and nature, culture, and agriculture are all valued, celebrated, and, most importantly, protected to the full extent of the law.

Government Orders

•(1100)

Our government's approach will see everyone with a stake or interest in this wonderful new national park working together, where a win for nature will also be a win for agriculture and for the cultural landscape of the park. In practical terms, this means that Parks Canada would apply its world renowned approach to conserving biodiversity and restoring native wildlife and ensuring the health of park ecosystems through rigorous monitoring of the park's flora, fauna, waters, and soil. Parks Canada would work with farmers to end the cycle of one-year leases and initiate a leasing regime that would foster economic stability. The farmers would in turn work to manage farmlands in an ecologically sound fashion, commit to conserving resources, and contribute to the visitor experience and cultural heritage of the park.

Integral to all of this, as emphasized in the bill, is the fact that Parks Canada would manage the health of ecosystems. It would apply this concept across all of the park's ecosystems, landscapes, and resources in a way that not only protects and restores natural and cultural heritage, but also promotes a healthy and vibrant farming community. This new type of protected area cannot, as some have requested, be managed for ecological integrity. The fact that more than 75% of the park's intended area has been altered or disturbed by civilization, the fact that it is in close proximity to Canada's largest metropolis, and the fact that it comprises a variety of landscapes and uses make the concept of ecological integrity simply inappropriate for the Rouge. Instead, this unique protected area calls for this new approach to conservation.

When the bill was before committee earlier this month, one of the witnesses we heard from, Mr. Larry Noonan from the Altona Forest Community Stewardship Committee, said:

Some people have asked why the term ecological integrity is not in the act. The Canada National Parks Act states that "ecological integrity" includes "supporting processes". As a further clarification of part of this definition, Parks Canada defines "ecosystem processes" as "the engines that make ecosystems work; e.g. fire, flooding...".

Mr. Noonan continued that "Ecological integrity cannot be applied to an urban national park." He was very clear, and he has the authority to stand by these words. Furthermore, he stated:

We cannot allow fires and flooding in the Toronto, Markham, and Pickering urban environment. The Rouge national urban park act cannot have this term included, or there would have to be a list of exceptions to the definition which could serve to lessen its impact in the Canada National Parks Act.

Stepping aside from Mr. Noonan's quotes for a moment, there are loopholes in Ontario's act that basically allow any number of events to take place, with profound negative impacts on both the protected area itself and the wildlife, archaeological realities, first nation realities, and the agricultural component of this unique new entity.

After saying that ecological integrity cannot be applied to an urban national park, Mr. Noonan said:

The Rouge national urban park act cannot have this term included...Instead, Bill C-40 refers to "the maintenance of its native wildlife and of the health of those ecosystems". The Rouge national urban park and the management plan lay out strategies for attaining the highest possible level of health for the park's ecosystems.

•(1105)

As well, we heard from many other witnesses, a list of whom I will not go into at this point, who did not believe that ecological

integrity was even achievable within Rouge Park due to its unique urban setting and the large percentage of historic land disturbance.

Conservation of nature is clearly one of the main objectives of Rouge national urban park and the integrated management approach is very much in keeping with internationally defined standards for the conservation of protected areas.

The legislative framework for the Rouge national urban park meets the definition of a category V protected area under the stringent criteria of the International Union for Conservation of Nature. This category of protected area applies where the interaction of people and nature over time has produced an area of distinct character, with significant ecological, biological, cultural, and scenic value. This is exactly what Rouge national urban park represents. I will commit to the House that Parks Canada will see to it that all of this park's unique components live up to the highest international conservation standards and receive the strongest ever legal protections in the history of the Rouge.

Integration is tailor-made for this unique landscape and it is the right way forward for Rouge national urban park. Integration allows us to protect, and future generations to appreciate for eternity, if I may say, the striking colours of sugar maples in the Rouge's Carolinian forest in the Fall and to enjoy the fresh maple syrup made by the Rouge's heritage farmers every spring. In other words, our integrated approach is just about as Canadian as one can get.

In light of this historic occasion and in the spirit of coming together for the public good to create a lasting legacy for Ontarians, Canadians, and citizens of the world, I would urge all members to support the bill before the House. The legislative framework for the Rouge national urban park meets the definition of a category V protected area under the International Union for Conservation of Nature's Stringent Criteria.

•(1110)

Ms. Rathika Sitsabaiesan (Scarborough—Rouge River, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague for his work on the Rouge Valley issue.

The member briefly mentioned that he was at the original visioning exercise for the creation of the Rouge national park. I was also there. The biggest vision at this exercise was to ensure that the park would be the people's park.

When the opposition put forward a simple amendment that would have dedicated this park to the people of Canada, why did the Conservatives vote against it? Why did the Conservatives vote against dedicating this park to the people of Canada?

Hon. Peter Kent: Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague for her support virtually from day one when we met in the early days of planning for the park.

This park would fulfill the dreams that Ontarians have held for decades now.

Government Orders

To the point of the member's question, it is sometimes possible to over-think the legislative process. The Parks Canada leadership has been magnificent over the past couple of years as we have moved forward through the various stages of consultation and planning. It goes without saying that the Rouge national urban park would be a people's park, and it will be unique in that it will be available by public transit to fully 20% of the Canadian population. It will provide a wonderful opportunity for those newer Canadians who might not have had a chance to experience our traditional parks as a springboard to more traditional protected areas.

Hon. John McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, all of the parties voted to send the bill to committee in anticipation that there might be some discussion and possibly even some amendments to the bill to satisfy some of the concerns that were out there prior to the vote. As it turns out, the government was not interested in any of the amendments presented, and in fact trashed a number of the witnesses who had slightly different views.

The hon. member spent a lot of time talking about ecological integrity and then ecological health. He says, arguably for good reasons, that this bill could not adhere to the ecological integrity standard of a park that we would expect in Canada. Fine, we will buy that argument. The replacement standard is ecological health, which is referenced in clauses 4 and 6. That is fine. We should find a definition of what ecological health means. Presumably it is a downgraded standard from ecological integrity.

I ask my hon. colleague, can he point to any definition of what ecological health is for this park, or is it really anything the minister says it is?

• (1115)

Hon. Peter Kent: Mr. Speaker, deep down I know that my hon. colleague does have the best interests at heart for this wonderful new protected space that is very close to his constituency.

As I mentioned in my remarks, fully 75% of the lands that will be enshrined and protected in this unique new national urban park in some cases have been seriously affected by civilization. There is an old garbage landfill in the area, which is part of the history of the area. There are wonderful archeological deposits in different parts of the park. There is an old auto wreckers shop where the land has been significantly polluted, which will have to be seen to in the course of time.

When it comes to the definition of ecological integrity, as applied and respected by Parks Canada in our more traditional parks where there is space and where natural fires and floods are allowed to take place to renew and revitalize those parks, it would simply be inappropriate to apply it in this particular setting.

As for the definition of ecological health, I come back to the point of my previous hon. colleague's question. There is a tendency sometimes in committee to overwrite legislation, to be specific with things that really should go without saying. The fact that Parks Canada has accepted stewardship of this new urban protected space, this unique space, and the fact that the national park plan, which every park must have, is already in draft form and available for reference by my colleague and others will more than reassure those who may be in doubt as to the definition of ecological health.

Mr. Colin Carrie (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of the Environment, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we all know that the Liberals, shamefully, have a history of playing politics with the Rouge. It dates back to the Trudeau Liberals of the 1970s, and, unfortunately, most recently Liberal minister Brad Duguid of Ontario, who made it clear in a letter to the Minister of the Environment on September 3 that he was insisting on the concept of ecological integrity in the legislation, and that without amendments he would not recommend transferring the provincial lands over to the federal government. Here we are at third reading with no amendments brought forward.

We have seen the unbelievable hypocrisy. The Liberal government does not even bring the park up to its own standards it professes to have. Should Ontario bring these lands up to the standards it professes to have before any lands are transferred and accepted by the federal government in this park?

Hon. John McKay: Mr. Speaker, on a point of order, I do not wish to quibble with my hon. colleague, but he said that no amendments were brought forward. He and I were there when 18 amendments were brought forward. I would think, as a point of order and a point of information, that he would want to correct himself with respect to that.

The Deputy Speaker: That clearly is not a point of order. It is a debating issue.

The hon. member for Thornhill.

• (1120)

Hon. Peter Kent: Mr. Speaker, I must say, in response to my hon. colleague, that I personally have been disappointed by the behaviour of the Ontario government, and not just in recent months but over the course of years.

In my previous incarnation, ministers of the Ontario government tried to ransom the transfer of the lands under their authority that will become part of the national Rouge urban park. They have been very unhelpful in recent days in trying to imply somehow that their conservation standards, their protection standards, are higher than Parks Canada's.

In fact, loopholes in Ontario's Greenbelt Act and the Oak Ridges Moraine Conservation Act grandfather environmentally destructive practices, which allows exemptions if endangered species are killed in the interest of the government of the day if a net benefit is provided. There is a very loose system of permitting. This suggests that the Ontario government, in fact, would perhaps be better focused on raising the lands under their current authority to the standards that will be required and overseen by Parks Canada.

Ms. Megan Leslie (Halifax, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I was hoping to get a question in to my colleague from Thornhill, but I guess we ran out of time. He started off his speech accusing the NDP of legislative vandalism, so I am going to start off my speech by talking about legislative vandalism.

Government Orders

Legislative vandalism? How about the fact that we have had time allocation in this House, cutting off debate, effectively limiting democracy, 82 times? He wants to talk about legislative vandalism? How about the fact that the Conservatives use in camera proceedings for any kind of real debate or discussion that happens at committee? The member wants to talk about legislative vandalism? How about the fact that the chair ruled Chief Allan Adam, of the Athabasca Chipewyan First Nation, out of order because he wanted to talk about the downstream effects, the impact, of the oil sands on his people? The chair said that Chief Allan should actually wrap it up, because they were there to talk about the benefits of the oil sands.

If Conservatives want to talk about legislative vandalism, how about the fact that we are at third reading on this bill and we have yet to hear from the minister herself, not one word. Where is she?

That is legislative vandalism.

Mr. Speaker, I would ask to be given a bit of a warning towards the end of my time, because I have a lot to say about this bill, and I want to make sure I can get in my key points.

When this idea of Rouge Park becoming Rouge national urban park was floated, we saw it in the throne speech. I am not generally happy with throne speeches, but I was really excited to see that. I love the idea of Rouge national urban park. The NDP is a great supporter of this idea of national urban parks to begin with. However, the fact that Rouge Park could be the first is exciting stuff.

Let us imagine if we could have urban parks across Canada, where people could take public transit to actually go see nature, be in nature, and understand the cultural and ecological significance of the space. It is a great idea.

We were so excited about it that the NDP was actually successful at committee. We were doing a study on urban conservation, and we were successful in getting a couple of days of study on Rouge Park so we could get an update. We heard from Parks Canada, the David Suzuki Foundation, Friends of the Rouge Watershed, and the Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society. We really wanted an update on how things were going since the throne speech, what we needed to know, what areas needed to be worked around or figured out, and where we needed to be creative.

In fact, we are so supportive of this idea of a national urban park at Rouge Valley that my colleague, the member for Scarborough—Rouge River, is a patron of the Friends of the Rouge Watershed. It is her personal commitment as a member of Parliament to say that she is engaged with the process and that it is something she supports and wants to see come to fruition.

We were all really excited when we saw this in the throne speech. What happened? I will note that we have been very supportive of the work on the ground that has been done around Rouge Park. Local, provincial, and national groups have worked for decades to make this happen. The idea of turning this into a national park, with all the national park status and national park protections that come with it, is something they have been working on for decades.

Imagine how excited they were to see this in the throne speech. They were actually at a point where they could see everything they had worked on coming to fruition. It was really happening. However,

I am holding in my hand a news release that all these groups worked on together and sent to all members of Parliament. I am going to read from it. We are so excited about this park, but listen to the news release:

Dear members of Parliament:

As organizations with a long-standing interest in establishing Rouge National Urban Park, we are writing to convey our grave concerns with Bill C-40. We urge you to oppose this bill at third reading. A more robust legislative framework is needed to ensure Canada's first national urban park will adequately protect the Rouge—an amazing natural treasure—for Canadians today and into the future. We attempted to work constructively through the Parliamentary process, supporting amendments to address major flaws in the bill when it was before the House of Commons Standing Committee on Environment and Sustainable Development in late October and early November. Unfortunately, the Committee rejected all proposed amendments.

● (1125)

There is a piece in here about the problems with the bill, but I will get to that in my speech. I want to skip to the last paragraph. It is emotional, and it lays out the situation for these groups:

The Province of Ontario has already informed Canada that it will not transfer its Rouge Park lands unless the bill governing the creation of the national urban park is amended to "meet or exceed" the environmental policies of existing Greenbelt and Rouge Park Plans. Bill C-40 fails to meet this test. If Parliament proceeds with this flawed bill, the province's substantial Rouge Park lands (25+ km²) may not be transferred to Parks Canada. The resultant Rouge National Urban Park will be less than half the park's announced size and will not include the heartlands of the park, the beautiful Rouge Valley system. It will be a park in name only.

Please oppose Bill C-40 at third reading and recommend that stronger legislation be drafted and brought back to the House.

It was signed by the executive directors of Nature Canada, Environmental Defence, the Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society, the David Suzuki Foundation, Friends of the Rouge Watershed, Ontario Nature, and the STORM Coalition. It is incredible to think that these groups would want us to vote against this bill, but that is the reality.

My colleague, the member for Beaches—East York, and I, after committee, were faced with a decision when none of the 19 amendments brought forward by the NDP were adopted. We were faced with a decision on what to do and what to recommend to our colleagues in voting on this bill. A lot of these groups, including Friends of the Rouge Watershed, Land Over Landings, and Ontario Nature, said to come to the park, and they would take us on a tour of the park and talk about what needs to happen. The two of us did that last Monday, and it was incredible.

People have worked so hard to protect this land over the years in the hope that one day, it could become a national urban park. After this incredible tour of farmland, wetlands, beach, and the valley we all gathered in an environmental education centre for young people, and the members of the groups spelled it out. They said, "We want you to vote against this bill."

Government Orders

How did we get here? How is it that these groups are pushing us to vote against it? It is not that we do not understand compromise. We cannot let perfect be the enemy of the good; that is the saying.

We had a similar situation with Sable Island National Park. If members remember that debate here in the House, Sable Island National Park is in my riding of Halifax. We had similar issues with the bill. It was not quite what we needed it to be.

We engaged with the legislative process. We brought forward amendments. Those amendments were rejected, which is kind of to be expected with the Conservatives these days, but we still did it in good faith. At the end of the day, I realized that the legislation for Sable Island National Park would carve out a protected area in the middle of a gas field. This is a natural gas field. It is a unique situation. It would carve out a protected area, and I knew that one day, on the Monday, there could be drilling in that national park, but if we passed that legislation on the Tuesday, there would no longer be the right to drill in that park, so it was worth it. Even though the bill was not perfect, even though we brought forward amendments and they were rejected, we still supported it.

I am incredibly proud of that work, and we will continue to work to make the legislation and the park management plan robust and strong and to put in the proper protections for that park.

However, Rouge national urban park is different, because this legislation crosses a line. It obviously is a precedent-setting bill. The park is the first national urban park in an urban setting. It can be accessed by public transit. It creates a new model for protecting areas in an urban setting, because we have to take into consideration the presence of highways. There is the 407.

• (1130)

I was overlooking the Rouge Valley the other day and I could hear the roar of Highway 401, even though I was looking at this beautiful nature valley. It was incredible. There are roads, highways, railway lines and farming, so it has to be different. A precedent will be set.

However, there is a negative precedent, and that is around ecological integrity. We heard the member for Thornhill talk about ecological integrity. He said that we could not protect ecological integrity in an urban park. I disagree. If we look at the Parks Canada Agency Act, it talks about the first priority being the maintenance or restoration of ecological integrity, which is the improvement of ecological integrity.

The International Union for Conservation of Nature has a definition of a protected area, which says, "A clearly defined geographical space, recognised, dedicated and managed...to achieve the long-term conservation of nature with associated ecosystem services and cultural values." They are different words, but the same idea. They talk about the conservation of nature. The prioritization of ecological health or ecological integrity is all conservation.

What do we have here? We have something totally different in this bill. I will read it verbatim, and members will be shocked, because the bill states:

The Minister must, in the management of the Park, take into consideration the protection of its natural ecosystems and cultural landscapes and the maintenance of its native wildlife and of the health of those ecosystems.

We go from prioritization, improving and maintaining to we should probably think about it, and that is not acceptable in the least.

I heard the speech of my colleague from Thornhill and all of the arguments at committee at second reading. The Conservatives said that a burn off of a forest could not be done when a highway went through it and there were houses, that farms would not be ripped up so trees could be planted to restore the natural ecosystem. No one asked for that.

At committee, we had incredible testimony from environmental groups, local organizations and farming groups. The Conservatives would have us believe that it is this environmentalist and farmer fight, and never the two shall meet. That is not the case. Everybody was perfectly reasonable at committee. Everybody said that they wanted to protect farms. Farmers said that they want to protect their livelihoods, but they wanted to have a park. Environmental groups said that they wanted to protect farms and have a park. Everybody was reasonable.

There was a way to figure this out and come to a compromise in protecting farmland and ensuring there were no silly rules that said that Highway 407 had to be set fire every 10 years to stimulate new growth. We are smart people. We are legislators. We have Parks Canada and legal drafters. I know them and they are smart people. We can figure out a way around this.

The NDP proposed many things, because there are a number of flaws with the bill, around the issue of prioritization of ecosystem health or ecological prioritization. We proposed to replace clause 6 and say that the minister must, in the management of the park, prioritize improvement of the health of the park's ecosystem. We are talking about prioritization. We are not saying that we have to do outrageous things that do not make any sense. We just want to prioritize the improvement of the health of the park's ecosystem.

Then we put forward a subclause (2) that for greater certainty, the minister must recognize and take into consideration the ongoing presence of agriculture in the park. That is important. I hear the Conservatives ask what is going to be done with the farmers. Let us spell it out. We are going to take into consideration the ongoing presence of farms in the park. We are not saying ongoing farms, but secretly this is a conspiracy to rip up all the farms and plant trees. We are talking about protecting the agriculture in the park.

I will read a couple of quotes from committee because they are so simple and straightforward.

• (1135)

Faisal Moola is from the David Suzuki Foundation. He said:

—we do not believe that maximizing ecological health and support for agriculture are mutually exclusive objectives in the park. The David Suzuki Foundation supports sustainable farming in the park.

That is perfect.

Government Orders

Kim Empringham is with the York Region Federation of Agriculture. She was wonderful at committee. She understood compromise and coming together to try to reach consensus. She said:

Two of the guiding principles for the Rouge national urban park are to maintain and improve ecological health and scientific integrity, and to respect and support sustainable agriculture and other compatible land uses.

We have a woman who testified on behalf of farmers and a man who has testified on behalf of environmental groups, and they are saying the same thing. What I do not understand is why we have this fake fight and this pretend argument that we cannot do this. We can do it. We came up with a solution. In my opinion, that one amendment would solve all the problems that we are having.

What do we do? I would like to talk a bit about the political process. We worked really hard within this process to create the best bill possible. If members remember, at second reading, the NDP was not combative on this. It said yes, that we wanted to get this to third reading. I think that we actually fast-tracked it a bit and said that we would only put up a certain number of speakers because we were eager to roll up our sleeves, get to work at committee and deal with this.

In our speeches, the New Democrats said that we wanted to come up with a solution, that we could do this and figure this out. We had quite supportive yet tempered speeches in the House. They were really interesting. We heard from MPs, mostly in the Toronto area because they know the park so well. They really wanted to say something about this park and be a part of navigating the path forward. The speeches were excellent.

We then worked with different groups. Sometimes it is back and forth. We are on the phone a lot. Someone says “what about this word?” and we are the go-between. You know this, Mr. Speaker, from your background in law. We negotiated that, but we did it, and we came up with this good amendment and really good language for clause 6.

What we had to do was talk to the grassroots organizations that wanted to protect farming in the park and yet recognize farms as another unique aspect of this park. I think we did it. What is left here?

The NDP brought forward 19 amendments at committee. It was a pleasure working with my NDP colleagues on this, because they really took it to heart. They really did want to ensure that the bill was better. Kudos to the MP for Scarborough Southwest and the MP for Scarborough—Rouge River for the work they did. We lost that fight, so we will take the advice of these groups that are on the ground that want to see this urban national park more than anything, but not at the expense of creating a bad precedent for urban parks from here on out. We will take their advice and we will vote against the bill.

However, we support this park, so what do we do? We have started that work already. My colleagues and I, particularly the member for Scarborough—Rouge River, have been sitting down with this amendment to clause 6, for example, and other amendments, and we will put together a private member's bill that will lay out what the NDP will do when it is in government, how it will change this bill to actually protect ecological integrity, yet ensure the ongoing presence of agriculture in the park. We will bring

forward this bill, and I will be so proud to do that. I hope I get to second the bill.

We can do this. We can have an incredible urban national park. We can make it the jewel in the national park crown and set a positive precedent for urban parks to come. That is what we are working on. I look forward to the introduction of that bill. We really will lay out how we can make this happen, protecting all of the interests that need to be protected, including the health of this ecosystem.

● (1140)

Mr. Paul Calandra (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister and for Intergovernmental Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I will take the member at her word. She talks about the environmentalists. Let us look at what they said.

When asked about farming, Caroline Schultz of Ontario Nature said that yes it wanted farming in the park, but “There are certain types of farming that would not be compatible.” If someone is a farmer, then it is adios.

Jim Robb spoke about the 600-metre ecological corridor and said that it would take 1700 acres of class 1 farmland out of production.

Parks Canada estimates that 2,000 acres of class 1 farmland will be out of production.

The member spoke against ecological integrity in the park because she recognized it could not happen in this park.

However, they cannot have it both ways. The members cannot say that they support farmers in the park, but then turn around and tell them what to farm, where to farm and how to farm in the park.

These people have suffered for 40 years, when their land was first expropriated by the Trudeau Liberal government. They deserve certainty. They deserve to be allowed to farm what they want, how they want, using best farm practices on the lands that were expropriated from many of them. That is the reality in this area.

Does my colleague not recognize the fact that the people she mentioned, who support the amendments brought forward by the NDP, do not actually live or work in the park?

Kim Empringham, a farmer, supports our legislation. If people are ratepayers, they support our legislation. They actually sent letters to us in support of the legislation. If they live, work or play in the Rouge, they support it. If it is an outside agency, which has no business telling the people in this area what to do and how to do it, it wants these amendments, which have only one purpose, and that is to kill farming. They cannot have it both ways.

Would the member just be honest and admit to the fact that the vast majority of the amendments brought forward, which spoke of ecological integrity, would do one thing, and that is eliminate farming from the Rouge?

Ms. Megan Leslie: Mr. Speaker, I know my colleague has the best interests of the park at heart and I know he has worked hard on this. However, I disagree with him. It is not adios, to use his word, to farming. We are talking about sustainable agriculture.

Government Orders

Let us look at the fact that right now these farms only have a one year lease. If farmers only have a one year lease, how much improvement will they make on their farm to make it more sustainable, even something as easy as tiling for draining? If they make that investment, it then will take a number of years to recoup that investment. We need to look at the fact that they have one-year leases and they have been unable to implement some of the sustainable farming practices that we would come to expect.

I would not think that Friends of the Rouge Watershed would be considered to be an outside agency. These groups have worked really hard. At committee, every one of them said that they were not talking about getting rid of the farms. The amendment I talked about at length says, “also the ongoing presence of agriculture”.

When he says that it cannot happen, that we cannot protect ecological integrity, it can. All we need to do is be creative, look at an amendment like what the NDP has brought forward, and we can solve these problems, not just throw up our hands and walk away from them.

• (1145)

Hon. John McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member's speech was thoughtful and she drew out the issues quite well.

I would like her to focus on clause 6, which says that the minister must take into consideration, and she emphasized the point “take into consideration”. What does that actually mean? Four things are supposed to be taken into consideration: protection of natural ecosystems, cultural landscapes, native wildlife and health of ecosystems, none of which is defined in the legislation.

It is a case of everything is a priority. If everything is a priority, then really nothing is a priority and the consequence of that is the people who the legislation purports to protect. The hon. member previously said that he was very concerned about the farmers. We are all very concerned about the farmers. However, the farmers are actually as vulnerable as anyone else in the park. If everything is a priority and therefore nothing is a priority and if we have a minister who is hawkish and has no fettering of his or his discretion, then the farmers could be more vulnerable than they think they are.

She rightly sets up this false food fight between the ecologists and the farmers. The crazy part of the whole thing is that it leaves the farmers as vulnerable as it leaves everyone else. That is why she is right to emphasize the point that definitions matter. We are legislators. We work on definitions.

Is the hon. member, like I, disappointed in how this has turned out over these last few weeks and months?

Ms. Megan Leslie: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his question and the work he did at committee on questioning witnesses. He is a neighbouring MP as well, and there are a number of neighbouring MPs to this park. We all want to see this park established, but how do we get there?

The member pointed out something that I will admit I had not thought about.

On the definition piece, certainly the NDP brought forward amendments to define ecological health and ecological integrity. We

are legislators, and we need to have those definitions. We need to talk about what we want to do and to spell it out. Sometimes a definition of ecological health or ecological integrity would specifically exclude something. For example, we could exclude the Highway 407.

The member brought up a good point about the definitions of the six things that the minister is supposed to be doing now, which could potentially put the farmers at risk. It makes me think about some of the discussions we had—and I do not remember if it was at committee or here in the House—about the park management plan. The Conservatives were saying “Just trust us; everything will be in the park management plan, and you will be really happy.”

Well, the management plan is not legislation. The management plan is policy. There is a big difference between policy and legislation. It could be the whim of a minister to say that they are not into the management plan anymore, and they then might do *x* or *y*.

Where are the protections for farmers? Why is that not legislated, as in the NDP amendment that we brought forward? Why is ecological health not defined?

The definitions matter, and they are our job as legislators.

Ms. Rathika Sitsabaiesan (Scarborough—Rouge River, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague from Halifax for her excellent speech on this topic. It clearly goes to show how vested she is in protecting this beautiful park, which is in my backyard. A large part of the current park is in my riding of Scarborough—Rouge River.

The current Rouge Park is protected under a patchwork system of over 10 different plans. For example, there is the Rouge Park management plan of 1994, the Rouge Park north management plan, the provincial Greenbelt plan, the Toronto Lake Ontario area of concern remedial action plan, and the Rouge River watershed plan. There is a patchwork of plans protecting the Rouge Valley, the larger ecosystem, and the parklands.

In committee, we heard the minister and many other people say that this is a patchwork system but that the bill would be better at protecting the lands and the park. In January 2013, the federal government signed a memorandum agreeing to meet or exceed Ontario's existing policies of protecting the greenbelt and Oak Ridges Moraine conservation plans.

However, we are now seeing in the media release and letter sent to all members of Parliament from seven different organizations on the ground, in the community as well as national organizations, that the bill is not good: the bill would not protect the park more than what already exists.

My question for my hon. colleague is on whether there is anything else that we could have done to make sure that this park is actually protected by federal legislation.

Government Orders

•(1150)

Ms. Megan Leslie: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for her question. She did drill down to the issue of the existing protections that are stronger than what would happen with this national park if the lands are transferred. The proposed legislation would not meet or exceed the existing protections that are in place.

What else could we have done?

I think we did everything we could, but we have to think about what comes next. Therefore, I am excited about our solution, to bring forward a private member's bill that would spell out what the NDP would do for the park when we form government, how we would bring it up to a standard that is acceptable and protect ecological integrity while also protecting the other activities in the park.

Hon. John McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is customary for members to stand and say it gives them great pleasure to enter into this debate and so on, but in fact it does not give me great pleasure to enter into this debate. I am quite disappointed with the ultimate outcome of this legislation. I had hoped that with the co-operation of the opposition parties at second reading that the bill could have moved to committee where we could have done some business, but the government chose to take its usual bullheaded approach that it is right and everybody else is wrong. The consequence was that there was no movement by the government on anything, whether it was on the size of the park, or trying to make Queen's Park happier, or for the literally thousands of petitioners and all of the various environmental groups, and even some of the farmers, who are worried about where all of this may end up.

It is without any pleasure at all that I rise to talk about this legislation on behalf of the Liberal Party. In the event that we are fortunate enough to form government, we will fix this because it is in need of a serious fix. This was and is a wonderful opportunity to do something right, but the government in its "wisdom" decided that its way is the only way to do things right.

I largely agree with Pauline Browes, a former minister in the Mulroney government, and her detailing of how various levels of government have come together over time, both Conservative and Liberal, to get us to the point we are at today.

It is ultimately a good idea to turn these lands into a federal park, but regrettably the whole thing has derailed. What caused this derailment? Was it Queen's Park? It said that unless the government fixes the bill, Queen's Park is not going to contribute its lands to the park. Those lands constitute some 44% of the park. Instead of what has been advertised as a 58-square kilometre park, it would be 44% less than that.

However, it is actually worse than that. It is not as if we can chop the whole thing in half, make a nice clean line, and end up with half of a park. This would actually be a Swiss cheese park. The lands are owned in bits and pieces by various entities, one of which is the TRCA, which is controlled by the Ontario government. Those lands run largely along rivers and stream valleys. Other lands are owned by the town of Markham, which will make its own decisions. Then there are the federal lands. The whole thing is going to be a mess. There are conflicting jurisdictions, right from Lake Ontario all the way up to the Oak Ridges Moraine. It is a lot of land.

The fifty-eight square kilometres is quite a bit less than the 100-square kilometres that the environmentalists wished to protect. Lands to the east of the park itself are entirely controlled by the federal government and largely set aside for the Pickering airport, much of which is surplus to any airport. That land could have been contributed by the federal government toward enlarging the park, but for whatever reason the government chose not to do that. The 600-metre corridor which would have connected the Oak Ridges Moraine and the bulk of the park itself could have been included in the lands in the first place, but it was not done, for whatever reason.

The Conservatives seem to be fond of setting aside land, but are not quite so fond of ecological integrity and habitat protection. The animals that are in the park would have to stop at some artificial line between the Oak Ridges Moraine and the end of the park; otherwise, I guess they would be fair game.

•(1155)

In the actual bill itself there are three squiggly little pieces of land in Markham. Therefore, we are not getting 58 square kilometres, 100 square kilometres, or any of the lands that the federal government could have contributed from the lands east of the park itself. Instead, we are getting three little squiggly pieces of land in Markham, and that is the content of the bill. However, as the government has argued, we should trust it.

How did this derail? Was it the Queen's Park decision? That certainly did not contribute. Was it the committee process? We would think that a bill of this significance would have had more than three hearings at committee, one of which was the minister and her officials arguing for the bill. Essentially, we had a total of four hours at committee to review the bill and to hear the concerns of people. This park has been 30 years in the making, and it boiled down to four hours at committee. Many of the witnesses were pre-selected for their views, which were favourable to the those of the government's.

The previous speakers alluded to the multiple amendments, many of which centred on the one issue of the creation of some ecological standard. We can argue as to whether there should be ecological integrity or ecological health, but there should be something. Right now, it is ecological nothing. There are so many priorities set out in section 6 that there are actually no priorities. Therefore, for a minister, possibly such as this one, who is predisposed to making it up as he or she goes along, that leaves everybody quite vulnerable. On the other hand, a subsequent minister might be very interested in one aspect, whether it is some sort of development aspect, farming aspect, or some ecological integrity part of the park. We could assume anything. The way that this legislation is written, the minister has almost fiat-like powers to direct the park, and from time to time that will bump up against the best interests of ecologists, farmers, residents, or other levels of government. We have the opportunity here to get it right, to set forward values and priorities, and what we hear is "Trust us."

Government Orders

It has perhaps derailed with the belittling of the witnesses and the exaggeration of the differences between the farmers and the others. Jane Philpott, one of our candidates for that area, and I, made a special effort to spend an entire day with the farmers. I enjoyed that day. I thought they were reasonable people. Their expectations were quite reasonable. I thought that these were people with whom we could do business. Therefore, my anticipation, largely fostered by the government's members, of some sort of hostility on the part of the farmers, was completely and utterly dissipated. I saw them as some of our foremost ecological stewards. They care about their lands. I was reminded of my father who had a farm not far from that site, and his land was his capital. The current situation leaves the farmers in a difficult position because they cannot enhance or develop their capital, whether with various farming techniques, drainage, or things of that nature. They are in a vulnerable situation. I am reminded of the worst words that a citizen of Canada will ever hear, which are, "I'm from the Government of Canada, and I'm here to help you." I would tell my farmer friends to beware of the bill. They might think it helps them, but a proper definition of ecological health would help them a great deal more.

● (1200)

I have to say that I was disappointed by the treatment of the witnesses who came before us and whose views did not line up with the government's preconceived views. We have to be worried about a bill that is not supported by the Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society, CPAWS, the leading organization in Canada recognized internationally, which is basically saying that we should go back to the drawing board and try to get this right because it will serve as a precedent for other bills.

Ontario Nature does not support it, the STORM Coalition does not support it, Nature Canada does not support it, Environmental Defence does not support it, and literally thousands of petitioners do not support it. They are not all foreign radicals. They are not all there to derail development and all of the rest of the ways in which environmental groups are demonized. They actually had quite reasonable, thoughtful and, I would respectfully suggest, modest suggestions as to how to get over the hump of the concerns of the Queen's Park government with the bill as presented by this particular government. Again, everyone else was wrong, the government was right, and there was absolutely no point at which we could arrive at any kind of compromise.

We have had some discussion about this rejection of the concept of ecological integrity. That is actually a difficult thing, and I could be persuaded that we cannot simply layer over the Parks Canada bill onto an urban setting. It seems like a reasonable proposition, but what is the alternative? We are driven to the other alternatives in clauses 4 and 6. When we ask a very simple question, which is what is ecological health, we either get a dozen answers, resounding silence, or tap dancing away from the question, because there is not a person in this chamber, not a person listening to this debate, who actually knows what ecological health is. It is thrown out there with the assumption that people will buy that idea and somehow or another it will work out in time.

The former minister, in his lead-off speech, said that some things go without saying. If we think about that, we are legislators and we put bills forward. To say it "goes without saying" is not something

we could put in a bill because it "goes without saying". If in fact there is a very concerned community about what those definitions should be, "goes without saying" is not an adequate response to their concerns.

We put definitions in a bill for good reasons. We put them in a bill to circumscribe the discretion of a minister. Ministers come and ministers go. Some are persuaded this way, some are persuaded that way, and with this government there is quite a turnover. In the course of eight or nine years of the government, it has gone through six ministers, one twice, and it has gone through either five or six deputy ministers in the same period of time. It is like two merry-go-rounds going in different directions simultaneously. It hardly creates a level of confidence that there is some direction going through Environment Canada or the deputy minister. It is perfectly natural, because the concept in the government is that everything is run from one place and one place only, so a minister and, for that matter, a deputy minister are substituted from time to time if we want to change the name or face of the organization.

● (1205)

It we put that in the context of this particular bill, in the course of the five, six, and possibly seven ministers we have had, each one would have a different idea of what ecological health might mean. Absent a definition, it goes without saying we cannot live with that. This is why this becomes the hill to die on.

Right now it is the ecological community that is unhappy with the bill. The hon. member for Halifax who spoke earlier listed all of the people who are unhappy with the bill. This time next year it might actually be the farming community that is unhappy with the bill, because this is a blank slate for any minister to do anything. Had we spent some useful time trying to circumscribe the arbitrariness of the bill, we might have come to a point where the entire House could support the bill and it could go forward. For the government's purposes, mysterious as they might be, that is not going to happen.

The other clause that gave some pause for concern was clause 8, the appointment of an advisory committee. It says that the minister "may" appoint an advisory committee. That also means that the minister may not appoint an advisory committee. If we take the arbitrariness of clause 6, which is that all priorities are priorities and therefore that we do not actually have a priority, and add to that the fact that the minister may or may not create an advisory committee, the consequence is that we would have the potential of a minister who may well be very arbitrary. That arbitrariness may go against a variety of any one of the communities that spoke, whether the environmentalist community, the farm community, or whatever. It leaves everyone exposed.

This is a whole series of reasons as to why the bill is derailed, when it could have been kept on the rails with a bit of reason and compromise.

Government Orders

There was also this whole argument about connecting the Oak Ridges Moraine with the bulk of the park in order to protect the animal populations that would go back and forth. This point actually exists in some form, although not very coherently, and would require some result where lands would be acquired. Obviously, lands could also be compensated at the same time. Again, I go back to the way the bill is quite arbitrary. Some minister might well say “Too bad for you, Mr. or Mrs Farmer. You're off your lands.” That, frankly, would be quite regrettable. The connection from the mouth of the Rouge all the way up to the Oak Ridges Moraine was something that would actually protect the ecological position of the park.

In summary, the bill is badly derailed. It could have been saved and still could be saved if the government were open to any amendments. Unfortunately, however, we are going to be in the position of it is their way or the highway. Regrettably, we could have achieved a consensus but did not. I dare say that it is quite typical of the government's attitude toward any opposition, no matter how mild or how reasoned.

• (1210)

Mr. Corneliu Chisu (Pickering—Scarborough East, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have great respect for my hon. colleague. He is an excellent lawyer and he has great experience in the House.

Parks Canada held extensive consultation with stakeholders. The great majority agreed with the methods applied by Parks Canada. We have seen the Parks Canada 2014 draft Rouge national urban park management plan strengthened in support of reaching goals, including an ecological link between Lake Ontario and the Oak Ridges Moraine and the protection of prime agricultural areas.

The draft management plan reinforces the province's Oak Ridges Moraine conservation plan by protecting prime agricultural areas and by conserving and connecting natural heritage uses and hydrological functions and land for future use.

My question is for my hon. colleague. I know he is talking about legislation. I am an engineer and I know mathematics. Development in mathematics cannot be done without postulates. Here we are, making a proposal for an urban national park, the first in Canada.

This is my question for the hon. member: does he trust Parks Canada?

Hon. John McKay: Mr. Speaker, I can trust Park Canada; it is the government I cannot trust. That is the issue.

There is no trust when we cannot even get a simple minor amendment to this legislation. The Conservatives have blown it. That is the issue. It was a simple fix, but the government rejected all of the amendments put forward by the opposition and rejected any suggestion, however mild, by the opposition, essentially saying, “It is my way or the highway.”

The member talks about the ecological link. Well, the Conservatives rejected that as well, so we do not have connection between the mouth of the Rouge and Oak Ridges Moraine. We do not have the 58 square kilometres as advertised. We do not even have 30 square kilometres, as the reality now is that it is bits and pieces, here and there. It is going to look like Swiss cheese. It is a bit of a mess.

I would love to trust the government, but we cannot.

Ms. Megan Leslie (Halifax, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I listened with great interest to my colleague's speech. We listen to the speeches and then write down ideas for questions, and the last sentence of his speech answered my question, so I guess this is more of a comment.

In the last sentence of the member's speech, he said that we could have found a solution, that we could have come up with something, that we could have found a solution. That is the thing that is most important to me: that we actually did try to find solutions.

First I need to say the legislation should not and does not speak to a change of land use. The legislation does not talk about tearing up farms.

However, if we go back to the international standard required for a park, to the definition of a “protected area” according to international standards, we find that conservation is to be identified as the first priority. What are we creating here? By the international standard, we are actually not creating a park.

We have had similar situations. This is not the first park. Yes, it is unique because it is urban, but it is not the only national park to compete with urbanization or infrastructure needs. Let us look at Banff National Park. There is a highway running through Banff. The CP railway runs through Banff. We figured it out.

I was going to ask the member whether he thinks we can find solutions to this as legislators, as drafters. I assume his answer is “yes”. That was a great speech.

• (1215)

Hon. John McKay: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member is right. This is not rocket science. Where there is a will, there is a way.

These are rather minor changes. Clause 6 could have had something in there about ecological health being the first priority among the other priorities. It could have included a definition of what constitutes ecological health. The member is right to point out that it has been done elsewhere.

We have to come to the conclusion that the government, for whatever reason, thinks being arbitrary has some sort of political advantage. The political advantage, frankly, escapes me. I am assuming it has to do with farm friendliness. We are all farm friendly; we cannot eat without them.

The real question here is this: why would the government pit this set of citizens against that set of citizens, when in fact both sets of citizens have way more in common than they do in differences?

Mr. Bruce Hyer (Thunder Bay—Superior North, GP): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member for Scarborough—Guildwood made a superb case that was well stated and well researched. He is right on target.

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I was there at the committee meeting reviewing the 18 amendments that the Green Party put forward, supported by the Liberals and the NDP. The hon. member was there and observed the absolutely unbelievable behaviour of all of the Conservative members at that session. Particularly dreadful was the performance by the member for Oak Ridges—Markham, who did not even pay attention to the amendments. Members were playing with their BlackBerry, mindlessly voting no to everything, and declaring things inadmissible that were clearly relevant.

I wonder if the member would like to comment on the behaviour that he saw and whether that is appropriate behaviour for parliamentarians in committee.

Hon. John McKay: Mr. Speaker, I really would not want to comment. The hon. member for Oak Ridges—Markham has to face his electors, and I will leave him to face them. “Good luck” is all I say.

What is regrettable in the whole exercise was the waste of the work that all of the opposition parties put in to try to make this bill workable so that we could all stand unanimously and support this bill going forward. It would not have been difficult to make that happen.

Ultimately, fiddling with a BlackBerry, ridiculing witnesses, or dismissing amendments out of hand is, frankly, no way to conduct a committee, but for the last number of years, that is not news.

Mr. Adam Vaughan (Trinity—Spadina, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we heard in some of the speeches earlier today that there is a disconnect between the provincial Government of Ontario and the federal government, and I am curious as to whether or not you are aware of any attempts to get the two governments together. Perhaps the Premier has written to the Prime Minister and is looking to meet, or maybe ministers are having those connections.

If there is a disconnect between these two levels of government, what steps are you aware of that have been taken by the government to try to bring the sides together to reach consensus on this important issue?

• (1220)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): The Speaker is not aware of any of those conversations, but perhaps the member for Scarborough—Guildwood is.

Hon. John McKay: Mr. Speaker, let me first of all say that in the initial thrust for this bill, there was a lot of support. At an official and, frankly, a political level, there was a great deal of consensus that this bill was going to go forward.

However, when the drafting of the legislation came forward, people actually read it, and it was kind of like a blind agreement. The Queen's Park government had trusted the federal government to meet or exceed the ecological standards that it had in its own memorandum, its own legislation, and its own regulations. Then the bill came forward, and it was, “Here it is. Take it or leave it.” That was the choice that was faced by the Queen's Park government.

I am sure that the officials then bounced it up to the ministerial level. I would not be optimistic that the Minister of the Environment would take a call from the relevant minister at Queen's Park. I am not privy to any of those particular conversations, but when I talked to

the folks at Queen's Park, they were pretty disappointed, frankly, that they could not support this legislation. They had expected more, and they got a lot less.

Mr. Corneliu Chisu (Pickering—Scarborough East, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I welcome this opportunity to speak to this most worthy bill.

Rouge national urban park will be a place that protects not only natural but also cultural and agricultural resources. It will be a place that provides access to landscapes and experiences that help to define us as Canadians. Bill C-40 would help make this vision a reality.

Rouge national urban park, a Canadian first, would see the creation of one of the largest and most diverse urban parks in the world. There are currently no other places that can compare to it.

This proposed national urban park is so big that it will house 79 working farms with views of Toronto's downtown core. That is something many urbanites rarely get to see, let alone experience, in our 21st century world.

The park would give urban children and youth a chance to learn about their region's heritage, from first nations' presence beginning at least 10,000 years ago to the more recent farming heritage dating back to the late 1700s. It would give them a chance to discover where the food they eat comes from. This would educate young Canadians and enable them to become tomorrow's informed stewards of agriculture and our precious natural and cultural resources. Indeed, this is perhaps one of the strongest selling points for the bold new legislation before us.

Among its benefits, thousands of acres of prime category one agricultural lands in York region would be added to the current regional Rouge Park as a result of this expanded mandate. Sixty-two per cent of the land set aside for Rouge national urban park would be agricultural, and it is not just any farmland. With the creation of Rouge national urban park, the Government of Canada would protect and keep in production some of the country's rarest and most rich and fertile soil. This is important, because farms in and around the greater Toronto area are fast becoming an endangered species.

Given that only 1% of all farmland in Canada is rated as category one, protection of these lands is vital, particularly since over two million acres of farmland have been lost in southern Ontario over the past 30 years due to urbanization and land zoning changes. Without the highest level of legislative protection afforded under Bill C-40, millions of Torontonians, Ontarians, and Canadians would lose access to this valuable farmland. Official park designation means we could preserve land that produces food for surrounding urban neighbours while also achieving amazing results in conserving native plants and animals and providing visitors with innovative farm, recreational, and visitor experiences.

In the lead-up to the tabling of the bill, Parks Canada consulted with thousands of Canadians and hundreds of community groups, organizations, and different levels of government.

Beyond public consultation, the bill before the House today was referred to an all-party committee process, which examined each and every aspect of the bill before carrying it forward in its present form. The Standing Committee on Environment and Sustainable Development heard from 11 different public witnesses and experts, including senior Parks Canada officials; a former chair and members of the former Rouge Park Alliance, the now-disbanded provincially appointed group that helped to manage the Rouge for nearly 20 years; farmers; and environmental groups. Of these witnesses, the vast majority supported the bill as is, including representatives from the Rouge agricultural community.

Some have tried to suggest that the government was playing politics by not accepting any of the proposed amendments of the bill. This is just not true. The truth is the majority of the amendments proposed by the official opposition and the Green Party called for ecological integrity to be included as a leading priority in the bill, despite the fact that only two out of the committee's 11 witnesses supported or espoused ecological integrity. To be clear, 81% of the witnesses present did not ask for ecological integrity to be included.

Moreover, two of the environmental groups presenting supported Parks Canada's concept of ecological health over the concept of ecological integrity. This makes it incredibly difficult to understand why the official opposition and the Green Party would put forward so many amendments that included ecological integrity. I wonder why these members chose to listen to only two of the witnesses. Even more concerning is why these parties chose to ignore the vast majority of the witnesses.

Many have asked why the government does not support the application of ecological integrity in Rouge national urban park. For those who are familiar with the subject matter, according to the Canada National Parks Act, which is the law governing national parks in Canada, "...ecological integrity" means...a condition that is determined to be characteristic of its natural region and likely to persist..." and evolve without interference.

• (1225)

In plain language, ecosystems have integrity when they have their native components intact, including ecosystem processes such as free-flowing rivers and streams, and when there is continuation of natural processes such as fire, flooding, pest outbreaks, and predation. For ecological integrity to persist, the ecological footprint of humans in and around a park would need to be minimized.

While ecological integrity is a noble concept and one that works well in national parks such as Banff, of which 96% is still wilderness, the principle of ecological integrity as applied by Parks Canada in Canada's national parks is not appropriate for Rouge's urban setting, its infrastructure realities, and the future infrastructure needs of the Province of Ontario and adjacent municipalities. Nearly 80% of the park area is considered disturbed or severely altered from its natural state, and this calls for a very different conservation approach.

Given this incredibly unique urban context, Parks Canada has developed a more suitable concept of ecosystem health and will apply this concept to achieve the highest level of conservation and protection in the Rouge's history by integrating the conservation of natural heritage values with human health and well-being, including

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air, soil, and water quality enhancement; food production; and recreational and educational opportunities.

Quite simply, ecological integrity, as it applies to Canada's national parks, does not work in a landscape that is fragmented by Canada's busiest highways, roads, rail lines, hydro corridors, parcels of private lands, homes, working farms, communities, and provincial and municipal infrastructure. This unique urban context makes Rouge unlike any other national park in the country, and that is why the Government of Canada decided to create a new category of protected area: a national urban park.

In practical terms, if the government were to apply the concept of ecological integrity to Rouge national urban park, the consequences on local communities, municipalities, residents, farmers, and other businesses would be harsh and severe. Applying ecological integrity would mean that most types of new infrastructure, including those for any potential future above- and below-ground needs of the Province and local municipalities, would not be allowed.

Ecological integrity would also mean that in-stream control structures that prevent flooding would most likely need to be removed. Natural stream channels would also need to be restored, regardless of their path through the landscape, and floods and the movement and evolution of rivers and creeks would be required to proceed naturally. Ecological integrity would prevent the use of environmentally friendly farming techniques, such as agricultural tile drainage.

Even more concerning, adapting ecological integrity in the Rouge would see many Rouge farmers evicted from working farms that have been in production since as early as 1799. There are reasons we do not see farming in places like Banff National Park or Gros Morne National Park. It is because active farming in itself is considered incompatible with ecological integrity as it is currently defined in the Canada National Parks Act. That is why anyone who says that he or she supports both farming and ecological integrity as it is legally defined by the Canada National Parks Act is at best naive or misinformed or at worst simply trying—without success, I might add—to appease the farming community.

Additional proposed amendments to the bill would have seen natural heritage conservation prioritized over cultural and agricultural heritage, and I would like to take a few moments to address this idea.

From the onset of this great project, the government has clearly stated the need for an integrated approach to conserving the Rouge's rich and diverse landscape and uses. The Government of Canada and Parks Canada have always made it clear that Rouge national urban park would prioritize equally the protection and celebration of nature, culture, and agriculture and the goal of connecting Canadians to this heritage. Again a majority of the witnesses called to committee supported our integrated approach, one that protects natural heritage but also extends these protections to the Rouge's cultural and agricultural heritage.

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Despite this, the official opposition and the Green Party put forward amendments that would see one component of the park, natural heritage conservation, take precedence over another element of the park. Did the official opposition and the Green Party mean to suggest that somehow 10,000 years of rich cultural and first nations history and heritage, as well as hundreds of years of agricultural heritage, should be second class? Are they suggesting that these other park components are somehow less important or deserve second-rate treatment?

Again, why did these members of Parliament ignore the majority of committee witnesses and opt instead to propose untenable and divisive amendments? Perhaps these members failed to read the Province of Ontario's very own and much vaunted Greenbelt plan, which does not place agriculture as a lower or second priority to nature.

• (1230)

It is clear that in putting forth these amendments, there was actually little regard for the public interest. Rather, it was an example of listening and catering to a narrow segment of the population. This is what leads to cynical public attitudes towards our political process.

The legislation before the House today is strong and will provide the Rouge with its highest legislative protection in its history. For some to suggest that this bill would somehow weaken the protection currently in place is simply wrong.

Should we be expected to believe that loopholes in Ontario's Greenbelt Act and Oak Ridges Moraine Conservation Act, loopholes such as grandfathering environmentally destructive practices, allowing exemptions so that endangered species can be killed if a net benefit is provided, loose permitting systems, and incredibly, self-monitoring of development projects, suggest the highest standards in law and policy that Parks Canada should adopt or strive for in the Rouge? These loopholes allow for significant commercial and industrial development, the dumping of toxic fill, and the killing of species at risk. These very same practices have been severely criticized by the very same organizations that are suggesting that somehow the bill before us today presents a step backwards in the protection of the Rouge.

Just this week, a tribunal in Pontypool, Ontario, listened to claims from concerned members of the public that industrial development on the supposedly provincially protected Oak Ridges Moraine will cause "serious and irreversible harm to plants, animals and the environment, particularly the Oak Ridges Moraine".

These are serious allegations and concerns being levelled against the same provincial legislation the opposition parties are upholding as examples of the best protection.

The bottom line is that Parks Canada would provide protections that would safeguard for perpetuity the Rouge's plants and animals, waters, cultural landscapes, and farmlands and would not cause them irreversible harm.

I emphatically suggest to members that the bill before the House today would meet and exceed any current or past protections in place for the Rouge, and it is shameful, given the strength of this bill and Parks Canada's international renown in conservation and ecological restoration, that anyone would begin to suggest otherwise.

In the Rouge Park of today, if one steals a fossil, kills an animal, vandalizes a national historic site, pollutes the waters, or dumps garbage and toxins in the forest, there are no law enforcement officers with a direct presence in the park to apply the law and safeguard this most incredible of resources. Rouge national urban park would have a full complement of year-round, dedicated law enforcement wardens in the park to enforce one strong and clear set of park laws and regulations and would have the ability to impose stringent fines and penalties to effectively enforce the law.

Apart from not knowing where the food on their plates comes from, many Canadians likely are unaware that farmland can play a role in preserving and restoring wetlands, forests, and grasslands that protect a wide array of species. Progressively managed farms support native biodiversity through good cropping practices, maintenance, and restoration of hedgerows, fallow fields, and woodlots by creating vital habitat that supports nesting and migratory birds, mammals, reptiles, and amphibians.

Farmland in the Rouge contains important natural heritage and hydrologic features, and the stewardship of these farms can help facilitate both environmental and agricultural protection. Farms in Rouge national urban park would therefore be integral to the long-term sustainability and health of the park.

It is for precisely reasons like these that Rouge national urban park would include and protect agricultural lands. The Rouge would require and promote sustainable farming practices to support the continuation and viability of farming and would contribute to natural and cultural resource protection, healthy ecosystems, and a quality visitor experience.

This Canadian-first approach would embrace working farms as a unique feature of the park and would integrate agriculture into the park's vision. These objectives would be confirmed in the legislation.

Parks Canada would continue to work with the farming community, academic institutions, and other stakeholders to define how this long-term farming presence could best be accomplished. For the first time in decades, farmers would be given long-term leases contingent on meeting the highest standards of sustainable farming practices. As long-time stewards of the land, the agricultural community has made evident its commitment to achieving the vision for the national urban park.

Equally important is that as older farmers retire there will be opportunities for a new generation of farmers. New and young farmers would join existing farmers, and all would have a chance to apply leading, innovative techniques that improve land stewardship and protect prime farmland for optimal use while maintaining time-tested traditions that make farming such an important part of our heritage. In the future, this will lead to increased diversity in farm types and sizes and in the crops grown in the park.

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•(1235)

Beyond the direct interests of farmers and food production, agricultural themes would be woven into the visitor experience. For example, visitors to the park could become involved in farm tours, workshops, and other programming. They could also take advantage of fresh food sold at farmers' markets or take part in agricultural fairs.

This would present a win for everyone. The legislation would facilitate ways for people to continue to live and work in the park, enhance their livelihoods, and work collaboratively in achieving the overall vision of the park. It would encourage sustainability and beneficial land management practices, ensuring the long-term health and well-being of the land protected by the park.

Rouge national urban park is a project that should be uniting Canadians, not dividing us. It is a park that has truly been developed by Canadians for Canadians. This is cause for celebration, not just in the greater Toronto area but from coast to coast to coast, as all Canadians would be able to access this one-of-a-kind national urban park.

Canadians strongly support our approach, which safeguards and promotes healthy ecosystems, respects local farmers, and creates unprecedented opportunities for new and urban Canadians to experience the richness and beauty of Canada's treasured federal heritage areas. Let us all work together in the interest of all Canadians and create a lasting legacy for our children's great-grandchildren.

It is with utmost humility and sincerity that I call on all parliamentarians to demonstrate their full support for this landmark legislation.

Ms. Rathika Sitsabaiesan (Scarborough—Rouge River, NDP): Mr. Speaker, my hon. colleague spoke about the importance of heritage and cultural experiences for the people around the park. My question for my hon. colleague is with respect to the creation of an aboriginal education centre, considering the fact that the traditional lands of the Mississauga, Huron-Wendat, and Seneca first nations people are within Rouge Park. They include a sacred burial site as well as an ancient village site.

There have been many activists on the ground. David Grey Eagle is one of the leading indigenous people who has been fighting to protect these lands to ensure that there is no development and that the sacred burial ground as well as the village site is protected. To ensure that the public would have the opportunity to learn the history, experience the cultural heritage, and be more educated about the land and the indigenous people's historical and cultural background in the area, he proposed creating an aboriginal education centre within Rouge Park.

That was one proposal I brought forward as an amendment at committee. If culture, heritage, and experience are so important, why did his colleagues in the Conservative Party vote against that amendment?

•(1240)

Mr. Corneliu Chisu: Mr. Speaker, I was active in several consultations held by Parks Canada. Parks Canada, in its stakeholder reports and management plan, outlined very well the importance of

aboriginals in this area and their history of more than 10,000 years in this area.

I do not know what my colleague's concern is, but I can assure her that under the management of Parks Canada, a reputable institution that is over 100 years old, the heritage of our native people would be amply recognized and shown to our generation of people who live in this area.

Mr. Adam Vaughan (Trinity—Spadina, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the issue of consensus and trying to emerge not only with an all-party agreement but with an agreement with the provincial government has been raised several times in debate today. The question that remains is this: Why does consensus require us to do what the government says as opposed to bringing the stakeholders around the table to come up with a common way forward?

Why is the provincial Government of Ontario being left at the side of the park? Why are the issues that have just been raised around the first nations and aboriginal communities not included in the plan? Why is something that has never been proposed by anyone, the eviction of farmers, suddenly seen as the one thing that has been achieved in this set of negotiations? No one has asked them to leave. No one has proposed evicting them. No one has ever suggested that they are not part of the park, yet the reason we are being told to support the legislation is that there is a consensus that they should leave. The one thing there is consensus on is that they should stay.

However, where other things are required, such as environmental standards and recognition of the first nations community, there is no consensus support around the government bill, yet we are being told to support it, because there is consensus.

Mr. Corneliu Chisu: Mr. Speaker, I am not part of the provincial government. I am now part of the Canadian government. However, I can say one thing. There were negotiations between the various entities. They had a memorandum of understanding. There were no objections or anything. Suddenly, Minister Duguid was against Bill C-40.

We have seen that both of our governments want the same thing in the Rouge: the strongest legislated protection so that rich biodiversity, ecological protection, and food production are protected now and into the future.

I do not understand his position. I know that it contradicts the rules of memoranda of understanding. I hope that he will come to his senses. The fact is that if we spent a day in the park, we would see an absolute disaster. Trails are broken and not maintained. I do not know where the money from the province is.

[*Translation*]

Mr. François Choquette (Drummond, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would just like to remind my hon. colleague that his government slashed funding by a third and cut one-third of the scientific positions in parks management. Partners, people and the member for Scarborough—Rouge River have been working very hard on the Rouge park file for a long time now.

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There was consensus on creating the park. However, the Conservatives have done such a bad job that they have managed to break that consensus; it had to be on purpose. How can a government break consensus on creating a park? That is unprecedented. It is really exceptional.

The Government of Ontario told the Conservatives that they were messing up. Stakeholders who appeared before the Standing Committee on Environment and Sustainable Development also told them they were messing up. They could have solved all of the problems just by making one small change to a clause in one little amendment, but they dismissed the amendment out of hand.

Why did they have to be so stubborn, so obstinate with the partners, the provincial governments and others, who were calling for the creation of a good Rouge park?

• (1245)

[*English*]

Mr. Corneliu Chisu: Mr. Speaker, the member opposite was speaking about the funding. Our government committed \$149 million for the creation of the Rouge park plus a commitment for future years for the maintenance of the park.

I do not know why the hon. member is asking why we are not providing funding for the park. I can assure him that we provided \$149 million for the park.

I am expecting that the provincial government will also put forward some money and bring the standard of the park up from what it is today. It is completely neglected.

Hon. John McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, if we wind back the clock six months, we had broad consensus. The Ontario government was on side, the federal government was on side, all the members from Scarborough and Pickering were on side, and the environment folks were on side. The farmers wanted some stability. They wanted something better than year-after-year leases, et cetera.

How did we get from there to here other than that at the point of consensus, the government drafted a bill that was so shockingly inadequate that the Province of Ontario withdrew its consent, the ecology folks went offside, and thousands of petitioners said, “No way”?

Is that the government's definition of consensus?

Mr. Corneliu Chisu: Mr. Speaker, consensus is a two-way street. That was negotiated in a memorandum of understanding. Everyone was in agreement, and then suddenly the Province of Ontario decided to withhold land. It listened only to seven environmental groups and so on. That does not lead to consensus. It leads toward confrontation, which is not needed in the creation of a national park.

It would be good for all Canadians to have this park. I hope that the Province of Ontario will come to its senses.

Ms. Rathika Sitsabaiesan (Scarborough—Rouge River, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am really saddened that I will not be able to support this legislation moving forward, because I was one of the people at the very first visioning exercise for the creation of the Rouge national urban park. I was the youngest person in the room, and

being the youngest person in the room, I knew that I would be the one to get to enjoy the park the most. I was super excited about it.

I will be sharing my time with a colleague.

While I will not be able to support this legislation brought forward by the government, I do support creating Rouge Park as a nationally protected park. We want this land to be protected. We want it to be a national park that everyone can enjoy for generations to come. This legislation would decrease protection.

I was so excited when I heard in the throne speech that the government planned to make the Rouge Park a nationally protected park.

I went to the day long visioning exercise. For years I have worked for the conservation and protection of the existing Rouge Park. The Rouge River is in my riding of Scarborough—Rouge River. The largest piece of the current Rouge Park is in my constituency. I am blessed to have this park literally in my backyard.

The Rouge Park is special in being located in an urban setting. Roadways, highways, hydro corridors, railways, and oil pipelines are all within the Rouge Park. It is a special park because most of our national parks do not have all of those things within their protected areas.

People on the ground affected by this park had a vision. We knew we could make it happen. We knew we could make it work. We could envision a nationally protected urban park that would include farmers, conservationists, environmentalists, highways, roadways, railways, and hydro corridors. Obviously these things could not be moved. We all thought there was real potential for a 100 square kilometre national park that would be called Rouge national urban park. We were excited about it because it is designated within the greenbelt natural heritage system. It is the northernmost point of the endangered Carolinian and mixed woodland life zones. The Rouge Park is the largest public park within the southern Ontario region that is close to 25% of the population in the greater Toronto area. A lot of us were excited.

Our party was happy to push the bill to committee at second reading. We believed that the government would have good faith at committee. We thought we would be able to put forward amendments that would strengthen the legislation now in front of the House.

I will talk about three items: ecological integrity; maintaining or exceeded the current protections already afforded within Rouge Park; and the 100 square kilometres. First, I will speak about ecological integrity.

The Canada National Parks Act states:

Maintenance or restoration of ecological integrity, through the protection of natural resources and natural processes, shall be the first priority of the Minister when considering all aspects of the management of parks.

Clause 6 in Bill C-40 states:

The Minister must, in the management of the Park, [and here is the catch] take into consideration the protection of its natural ecosystems and cultural landscapes and the maintenance of its native wildlife and of the health of those ecosystems

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The difference is the strong piece that already exists in the Canada National Parks Act, which says that maintenance and restoration and protection of our natural resources should be the first priority of the minister.

• (1250)

In contrast, the new legislation put forward by the government would water it down so much that although the minister must take it into consideration and think about it, he does not have to do anything about it.

Let us look at it as people on the ground who love this park would. I am in the park at least once a week or, if not, once every two weeks. It is part of my life. We want to see it protected. We want to make sure that it can last for generations to come. This bill would significantly water down the protection of the ecosystems and would not really help in maintaining the ecological health or integrity of the park.

I want to make it abundantly clear that the NDP supports the creation of a Rouge national urban park, but not if it means that the protection of its ecological integrity is risked. That is what would happen with this bill, and that is why, sadly, I cannot support it moving forward as the Conservatives have outlined it.

I know that I only have 10 minutes, so I will move to my next topic, that of meeting or exceeding the existing protections. My colleague who spoke on this bill earlier mentioned the memorandum of understanding between the Province of Ontario and the federal government that was signed in January, 2013. The federal government signed this memorandum of agreement to “meet or exceed” Ontario's existing policies, which included the greenbelt and the Oak Ridges Moraine conservation plans, during the drafting of the legislation and management plan for the Rouge national urban park.

The provincial greenbelt plan provides provincial policy status to the Rouge park and watershed plans. I know that the current protection for the park is a patchwork of about 11 different policies and plans. The federal government agreed to meet all of those existing plans. I agree that they are patchwork, but the federal government agreed that it would ensure that the new legislation, Bill C-40, would meet or exceed the protections provided for this park.

The provincial minister sent a letter to the federal minister, who, I must add, has not yet spoken on this bill once. We have reached third reading, the last stage of this bill, and the current minister of the environment who is responsible for this has not even spoken on the bill once, which I think is absolutely shameful. I have digressed a little.

I will paraphrase a letter that the provincial minister of economic development, employment and infrastructure wrote to the federal minister, as I do not have time to quote it. He basically said that the protections for the park in Bill C-40 are much less than what already exist in Ontario through the existing provincial policies and plans. The current state would enhance the ecological integrity of the proposed Rouge national urban park. The provincial minister said that he would not be able to transfer the 5,400 acres of lands currently owned by the provincial government for the creation of the Rouge national urban park.

That takes us right to my third point of the 100 square kilometre park. The community dreamed of a 100 square kilometre park, which would be absolutely amazing, but then the government proposed a study area of 58 square kilometres. Now, with the provincial government not willing to transfer more than 25 square kilometres of land, this new national park would be less than one quarter of the size all of us on the ground had dreamed of for decades.

I am going to read a little bit from a letter that was sent to all members of Parliament from seven different environmental organizations. They asked us not to support Bill C-40 at third reading. They said that they had attempted to make it better, to work with the agricultural community, environmentalists, and the government. They opposed passage of this flawed bill, saying that it would not be good for the Rouge national urban park.

Mr. Speaker, that is why I am giving you and all the people who care about the Rouge park my word today that I will be working on writing a new private member's bill that would improve this bill. I look forward to being able to table that in the House and eventually seeing it become legislation once we have an NDP government.

• (1255)

Hon. John McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to refer back to an intervention by the previous NDP speaker when the Conservative member had talked about how we cannot have it both ways, that either we love the farmers and hate the ecologists or we love the ecologists and hate the farmers. I want to ask the hon. member if she thinks we can have it both ways, whether with some proper drafting, good will, and possibly even some consensus, we could legislate protection for both farmers and ecologists to minimize the differences rather than maximize them.

Ms. Rathika Sitsabaiesan: Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague from Scarborough—Guildwood for his pointed intervention. I think it was a very good one.

My colleague from Halifax mentioned that in the amendment put forward by the NDP to clause 6 of the bill, we had proposed enshrining into legislation the protection of agriculture for farmers as well as the environment, and the need for conservation and ecological health and integrity in Rouge Park. I think the farmers would agree because all of the witnesses who came to committee were reasonable. I took it upon myself to ask all of the witnesses if they felt that farmers and the environmentalists were at opposite ends and whether or not they could work together. They all said that there was common ground and that they could work together.

I want to finish this response with a quote from Ms. Kim Empringham, who was from the York Region Federation of Agriculture. She said:

Two of the guiding principles for the Rouge national urban park are to maintain and improve ecological health and scientific integrity, and to respect and support sustainable agriculture and other compatible land uses.

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She was clear that the farmers in York region she represents say that we need to improve ecological health and scientific integrity, as well as maintain sustainable agriculture. The farmers have already said they are environmental stewards of their farms by running them in an environmentally friendly way, and that is what we all want.

● (1300)

Mr. Bruce Hyer (Thunder Bay—Superior North, GP): Mr. Speaker, Bill C-40 needs amending but is not getting it. A big part of it is that on January 26, 2013, there was a memorandum of agreement between Parks Canada and Ontario, which Ontario has now backed out of. The goal of that agreement was to meet or exceed the following existing protections in the area: the greenbelt plan of 2005, the Oak Ridges Moraine conservation plan, the Rouge north management plan, the federal green space preserve master plan, the International Joint Commission water quality agreement, the Rouge River watershed plan, and the Rouge Park natural heritage action plan.

My question for the hon. member is this. Why are we proceeding with something that instead of meeting or exceeding the present protections would actually degrade and worsen them?

Ms. Rathika Sitsabaiesan: Mr. Speaker, my hon. colleague forgot a few other plans that are already protecting it, like the Oak Ridges Moraine conservation plan of 2002, the Duffins Creek watershed plan, and the federal green space preserve. I can go on because there are other pieces or plans that are protecting that land, and it makes no sense that the federal government is creating legislation that would weaken the protections of an existing park. We are creating legislation to create the first ever urban national park in this country, yet the government wants to provide less protection for the parklands. It just makes no sense. That is why Nature Canada, Environmental Defence, CPAWS, the David Suzuki Foundation, Friends of the Rouge Watershed, Ontario Nature, and the STORM Coalition all came together and asked all hon. members in the House to vote against Bill C-40, which is clearly a flawed bill and is providing less protection for this park.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Hélène LeBlanc (LaSalle—Émard, NDP): Mr. Speaker, about 15 years ago, the House passed three pieces of legislation that have been crucial to protecting our collective heritage: the Canada National Parks Act, the Canada National Marine Conservation Areas Act and the Parks Canada Agency Act.

Today we have a magnificent network of 44 national parks and four marine conservation areas that we are very proud of, because these natural resources are for the benefit of all Canadians.

However, while we are protecting this wilderness, we must also acknowledge the fact that Canada is now an urban country. In 2006, more than 80% of our population was living in our cities. That is why this bill to create the Rouge national urban park is so important.

The project begins a new phase in the history of our conservation practice by establishing Canada's first national urban park. Clause 4 of this innovative bill outlines its objectives, which include protecting and presenting, for current and future generations, the natural and cultural heritage of the park and its diverse landscapes, promoting a vibrant community and encouraging Canadians to discover and connect with their national protected heritage areas.

This bill creates a new framework for the ecological protection of Canada's urban areas. Rouge Park is already the largest park in Canada's largest city. The park is home to a wealth of exceptional ecological resources, including one of the largest Carolinian forest habitats in Canada and important heritage sites such as an old portage route, Lake Simcoe and Lake Ontario.

The current Rouge Park owes its existence to the perseverance and continued efforts of citizens' groups that have been working hard for decades to preserve it. If the government is serious about its commitment to Rouge Park, it must act diligently and respect Canada's long tradition of conservation.

● (1305)

[*English*]

The bill would create a new precedent for ecological protection in urban settings in Canada. Rouge Park is an incredible resource, the largest park in the largest city in Canada. We should recognize and congratulate the efforts of concerned citizens who have preserved this natural legacy for many decades. We have to do justice to their efforts. If the federal government plans to take responsibility for the park that they have fought for, it must do so carefully and correctly.

We now have many prominent organizations that have worked with the park and have signed a letter recently, opposing the bill as it exists today, including the David Suzuki Foundation, CPAWS, Nature Canada and Friends of the Rouge Watershed.

The provincial Government of Ontario has expressed that it will refuse to contribute its lands to a park governed by the provisions of Bill C-40.

[*Translation*]

Given the importance of the mandate to create the first urban national park, I want to reiterate the importance of doing so properly. Bill C-40 raises concerns, mainly with regard to the minister's priorities when it comes to conservation. The priorities in Bill C-40 are different than those for a national park.

Bill C-40 states:

The Minister must...take into consideration the protection of [the park's] natural ecosystems and cultural landscapes and the maintenance of its native wildlife and of the health of those ecosystems.

However, in the case of a national park, the minister's first priority is to maintain the ecological integrity of the park through the protection of natural resources and processes. If we accept a model that will henceforth protect the ecology of urban settings, then we must ensure that ecological protection is a real priority and not left to the whims of a minister.

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Creating a national urban park is something that a number of my constituents are interested in. I have the good fortune and privilege of representing LaSalle—Émard, an urban area on the Island of Montreal along the St. Lawrence River. In the middle of the river are the Lachine rapids, a natural obstacle that contributed to the creation of the Lachine Canal, the birthplace of industry in Canada, and the St. Lawrence Seaway, the second-largest in the world.

Besides its historical importance, the Lachine Rapids are the spawning grounds for 50% of the freshwater fish in the St. Lawrence River. Des Rapides park, which is adjacent to the Lachine Rapids, is a migratory bird sanctuary that is home to one of the ten largest heron rookeries in North America.

We are proud of this resource, and I invite my colleagues to visit this beautiful Canadian region. We are very proud of this resource, which has environmental, cultural and historical significance, from the settlement of first nations to industrialization.

Last month, I organized a forum on the future of our river, rapids and canal, which was attended by more than 120 people, in order to promote the importance of creating an urban park like the Rouge park.

At this forum, we discussed the importance of these Canadian urban jewels. My riding of LaSalle—Émard, much like the Rouge park, has sites like this, sites of exceptional natural beauty that are also part of our historical heritage. Due to the proximity of urban areas to these exceptional sites that we must preserve and enhance, people can get there very easily by public transit, by bike or on foot. There will be expert resources working as site interpreters.

I am very serious about creating a national urban park like the Rouge park. I would like to reiterate the importance of establishing solid guidelines in Bill C-40, not only to ensure we protect the land and preserve species, but also to really make this a priority.

• (1310)

Mrs. Carol Hughes (Algoma—Manitoulin—Kapusking, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I really appreciate my colleague's speech.

We have heard some very good speeches on the shortcomings of this bill and on the Conservatives' habit of opposing proposed amendments, even when they would make improvements. A number of people would like to have a national park like the Rouge urban park, but the government is unwilling to look at ways to preserve the park. We think it is important to create a national park, but also to provide adequate protections for that park.

Would my colleague like to say more about the recommendations we proposed and about the need to implement them before this bill passes?

Ms. Hélène LeBlanc: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for her question and I congratulate her for the work she is doing within our caucus. Her region in northern Ontario also has some sites of exceptional natural beauty that are just as important to protect and discover.

Citizen groups have been examining this issue for decades and are have been working to protect this region. They turned to the Government of Canada to create a partnership in order to strengthen and to continue working on protecting the beautiful Rouge national

urban park, which is home to some exceptional sites that I look forward to visiting.

The Government of Canada needs to respond to the requests of these groups, which worked very hard. It needs to be a partner that will understand the priorities for this park.

• (1315)

Mr. David McGuinty (Ottawa South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague. I want to talk about the same thing she did, namely partnership.

More and more in the House, we are seeing that this federal government is refusing to work closely with the provinces, particularly Ontario. At a dinner yesterday evening here in Ottawa, Premier Wynne gave a speech in which she clearly indicated that she was still waiting for an answer from the Prime Minister of Canada so that they can begin working together on a number of files, including the Rouge national urban park.

Can the member help us understand how a federal government can continue to act this way? The two levels of government should have finished the work and should be ready to sign an agreement, yet there is no consensus or partnership. The federal government is not co-operating when it comes to the mines in northern Ontario.

Ms. Hélène LeBlanc: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague for his remarks.

Here, we all want our country to move forward. By definition, a confederation is a group of federations with harmonious federal-provincial relations. Such relations are part of a long-standing Canadian tradition. In order for our country to progress, these relations need to remain strong.

However, since the Conservative government took office, particularly since it obtained a majority, there seems to have been a breakdown in relations with the provinces and even the major cities of this country.

Let us work together to move this country forward.

[*English*]

Mr. Paul Calandra (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister and for Intergovernmental Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is truly a pleasure to rise on debate on this bill.

A number of people have been working to create the Rouge national park for many years. By and large, these people truly have the best interest of the land and national heritage first and foremost.

For many years, the people in this area have wanted governments in the past to try to strike a balance between protecting the natural heritage of the area and also protecting the farmers.

I have said this before, but I will recap a bit.

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Many of the lands in the northern part of what would become the Rouge national urban park are class 1 farmlands. These lands were expropriated from farmers in the early 1970s by the Trudeau Liberal government for the creation of an international airport in Pickering. Thousands of acres of class 1 farmland were stripped away from farmers. In some instances, farmers were evicted from their farms. In other cases, they were given one-year leases. This has been the reality for these farmers since the early 1970s. They have been working off one-year leases on class 1 farmland.

To fast forward a number of years, the Bob Rae NDP government in Ontario started to try to bring together a process by which we could look at the Rouge Park differently. For the most part, the concentration was on the lands to the south of Steeles Avenue in Toronto.

What we saw through that process and the lands south of Steeles Avenue was that the farmers in that area were systematically, slowly but surely, eliminated. The class 1 farmland in that area is virtually non-existent today.

We have heard speaker after speaker from the opposition get up today and talk about how they believe we can bring forward a process that would not only protect farmers, but would also protect and provide ecological integrity for the Rouge Park going forward.

I know opposition members, particularly from the NDP today, have referenced the fact that they visited the Rouge Valley. They have had some meetings with, by and large, the environmental groups that are opposed to this legislation. They also reference comments made by a farmer at committee, and we have heard it twice in debate today. Her name is Kim Empringham from the York Region Federation of Agriculture.

Bear in mind that the federation represents 700 farm businesses in this area, which is responsible for thousands of dollars of economic activity and hundreds of jobs in the community. Farmers have been there for over 200 years, and the history of farming in this area goes back over 400 years.

What did Kim Empringham from the York Region Federation of Agriculture actually say? She said that the York Region Federation of Agriculture supported what Parks Canada had done. It supported the consultation process that Parks Canada had done and the legislation, which we are debating today, as is.

When asked by the member for Halifax about the legislation, Ms. Empringham said:

We're worried that we will gradually over time lose the land we have. When equal priority isn't given, it's hard for farmers and for agriculture to hold its ground and to maintain that level field.

Moreover, we heard from Mike Whittamore, who is a very successful farmer on the provincial lands in the northern part of the Rouge Park.

To be clear, there are two sets of lands. There are the federal lands on the northern part, which were seized for an international airport by the Liberals in the 1970s, and there are thousands of acres of provincial lands, which, by and large, were accumulated through either the Bob Rae NDP government or the Mike Harris Conservative government and put under the protection of the

Toronto and Region Conservation Authority. Some of those lands were also provided by the city of Markham and put under the protection of what was then called the Rouge Park Alliance.

• (1320)

Mike Whittamore is a farmer on provincial lands. He is a very successful farmer. He is one of the farmers, in the 1970s, whose family had been there for 200 years. His farm was expropriated from him, and he has been living off a one year lease ever since. What did Mr. Whittamore, a farmer, say? He said that what he was afraid of is that this would become the death of 1,000 cuts. He said the first step would be re-forestation, after that it would be pesticides and fertilizers, and we would go on and on.

What rationale does Mr. Whittamore have for that? I talked about it before in the House. What evidence does he have of that? In 2007, it was the same provincial government and Minister Brad Duguid, who is now suggesting that provincial lands should not be transferred, that went another step further in this area. They took hundreds of acres of class 1 farmland out of production and evicted the farmers from their lands and homes.

Hon. John McKay: That's a lie.

Mr. Paul Calandra: Mr. Speaker, the member for Scarborough—Guildwood says it is a lie. It is remarkable that he says it is a lie because there are all kinds of press releases. I would encourage him to read the article so he can see that his colleague from Markham—Unionville was there for the presentation of a \$2 million cheque when farmers were evicted from their lands in what is now called the Bob Hunter Memorial Park in this area.

Prime farmland in 2007 was taken out of production with a smile by the same minister who was at the time parliamentary secretary to the minister of municipal affairs and housing, the provincial member of Parliament for Markham—Unionville, the federal member of Parliament for Markham—Unionville, all happy about what was about to happen with the removal of these farmers from their lands, with a \$2 million cheque.

The Bob Hunter Memorial Park still is not open to the public. That is the type of park management the Liberals across the way and their friends in the provincial government are supporting. That is what farmers are afraid of, because they know what happens when they entrust their futures to other people. What happens is they suffer, as Mr. Whittamore has said, the death of 1,000 cuts.

The members opposite have talked about ecological integrity. Among the witnesses who appeared at committee, who have actually been managing the resources in that area, was Ian Buchanan of York region. He said that it was impossible, that we could not bring ecological integrity to this park not only because of Highway 401, not only because there was a landfill in the area and the Metro Zoo, but for many other reasons. Mr. Buchanan of York region government talked about the successes and stated:

In addition, I have 15 years of environmental enforcement background at three different levels of government, and what was sadly lacking among all of the framework of legislation in the past was that there was no one window for environmental protection. There were multiple layers and people didn't know who to turn to about what activities were taking place. The one window is a blessing for the Rouge Park.

Larry Noonan, as was referenced by the member for Thornhill, who is with a ratepayer group, supports the legislation that we have brought forward. It recognizes that the goal of environmental integrity is impossible to attain in this area. It also supports the continuation of farming in the area.

Many of the members opposite have referenced Friends of the Rouge Watershed, Ontario Nature and a number of other organizations. A representative of Ontario Nature appeared in committee, Caroline Schultz. We often hear members opposite say not to worry about farming, that it will be protected, that it is all okay. When Ms. Schultz was asked about a corridor, she said that she supported a 600-metre ecological corridor that would take 2,000 acres of class 1 farmland out of production, but said that we should not worry because farmers could still farm.

● (1325)

However, depending on the type of agricultural production that is taking place, she said there were certain types of farming that would not be compatible. Already they are making plans to eliminate farmers from the area.

On the Rouge park management plan, a number of the members opposite have submitted petitions and have talked about their support for organizations like Ontario Nature, the David Suzuki Foundation and Friends of the Rouge Watershed and how important it is.

The member for Scarborough Southwest, when speaking about the Friends of the Rouge Watershed, said, "Nothing will ever be accomplished in Rouge Park without buy-in from the Friends of the Rouge Watershed." Who disagrees with that? The 700 farmers who actually farm in the area, and the ratepayers who actually lives in the area. The Cedar Grove ratepayers association disagrees with it. People who actually live, work, invest or play in the Rouge disagree with everything the opposition has said with respect to the Rouge and preservation.

Why are farmers so worried about what the environmental groups have put forward? It is because in the Rouge park management plan, this is a section they support. This is from the plan:

Part of protecting cultural heritage values in the park involves the continuation of active farming. Since all activities must dwell within the framework of park goal and objectives, with the highest priority being the protection and restoration of the park's natural heritage, some reduction of farm land base is recommended to permit natural restoration goals to be met.

These are the people and the policies that the members opposite are telling farmers they have to swallow yet again.

Let us talk about the 600 metre ecological corridor. I thought it was 1,700 acres of class 1 farmland that would be taken out of production. I was wrong. It is actually 2,000 acres of class 1 farmland that would need to be taken out of production to meet what the environmental groups have suggested has to happen in the Rouge Park. Let us take that into consideration.

When asked by Ms. Empringham and Mr. Whittamore what that would mean, Mr. Whittamore said it was "death by a thousand cuts". Ms. Empringham, on behalf of farmers, suggested that people who believed that did not understand farming. The equipment is bigger

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and it is more intense than it was before. This would almost certainly lead to fewer people farming in the Rouge Park.

The opposition also talks at length about Mr. Robb. Why do farmers fear Jim Robb? Why do they fear the environmental groups that have signed onto this? What has Mr. Robb called our farmers?

He called our farmers industrial cash cropping farmers who planted products that harmed the environment. This was at a committee in front the city of Markham. He went on to say that he was willing to share the Rouge Park with the heritage farm community.

When we had Mr. Robb in front of our committee and asked him to describe what a heritage farmer was, he suggested that a heritage farmer was somebody who was there when the lands were expropriated.

What he was saying in front of the city of Markham was that he would share the park with the heritage farmers, but the farmers who were farming class 1 farmland in the area who did not own the land when it was seized from them did not have a right to be on that land producing.

He was on a committee with a gentleman by the name of Reesor. The Reesor family is one of the original families that actually settled that area. Mr. Reesor actually started farming in that area in 1985. He would not be considered a heritage farmer. He would be evicted, presumably, under Mr. Robb's definition, which is supported by the opposition, from those lands that he has been farming since 1985 and that his family has been farming for over 200 years.

We heard from witnesses. I have met with a number of farm groups. I met with countless constituents of mine. They all say the same thing; that we have to protect the farmers in the northern part of the Rouge.

● (1330)

At the same time, we have to do our best to protect the southern part of the Rouge, which is in the hands of the provincial government. At first, all the provincial government wanted was a hundred million bucks. It said, "Give us \$100 million and we'll turn our backs on the Rouge. You can do whatever you want with it, just give us that \$100 million."

Alan Wells, former chair of the Rouge Park Alliance, said that had never been done before. When we called them on it, they then changed their mind and said, "Okay, maybe \$100 million is asking too much." Part of that deal was also saying that ecological integrity was important to them. However, no, it was "Give us \$100 million. We'll turn our backs. Congratulations. Move forward with your park."

We said no; that was not our priority. Our priority was to amass these lands on behalf of all Canadians and to create something special in the Rouge. That is what we are moving forward with.

Let us look at what has happened. People have been calling upon the federal government to take leadership in the Rouge for decades, and we came forward with that protection. We came forward with a plan that engaged Parks Canada.

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I have not ever heard anyone in this House who would suggest that Parks Canada is not among the most professional organizations and one of the best stewards of our parkland. In fact, it is world renowned for what it has done in creating national parks and in protecting our natural heritage around this country.

Parks Canada sat down with farmers and actually changed the relationship that government had with its farmers in the area. It changed that relationship to make it more co-operative. They worked together and got the buy-in of farmers to participate in the Rouge national park.

The federal government then set aside over \$140 million to create this park, to make it a reality, so that millions of people in the GTA could have access to a national park. We incorporated visitor centres so that people could understand what is important about the area. We established a farming centre to the north of the Rouge Park, so people could understand the 400-year tradition of farming in the area. To the south, there are going to be trails so people can enjoy the Rouge park. They will be able to enjoy their visitor experience. There was going to be upgrading to the environment, upgrading that the provincial government has never done.

The provincial government has put forward a set of circumstances to transfer lands, and it wants us to do what it has never done. By the way, that does not include its infrastructure demands. The provincial Liberal government said, “You need ecological integrity, but, just a second, we need a whole swath of that exempted because we might have future infrastructure demands over the area. You can forget about that portion, but for everything else you should have ecological integrity.”

Forget the fact that the provincial government has never done it. Forget the fact that this legislation would increase the protection of the environment to the highest level it has ever had in this area. Forget the fact that the people who live, work, and play in this area, and have done so for decades, do not agree with what the provincial government is doing. They agree with the approach we are taking, and actually appeared before committee to support this government, to support the Parks Canada initiatives. We are supposed to throw all of that out and pay attention to groups that have no vested interest in the park unless they are getting paid. That is the reality here, and to suggest anything else is wrong.

When they talk about the amendments they brought forward, page after page of amendments, what are the vast majority of these amendments about? They are about ecological integrity. Did we vote against them? Darned right, we voted against them. To vote in favour of them would mean we would be evicting farmers. We cannot have it both ways.

To sum up, to those who suggest that they cannot support this bill, look at it this way. If the provincial government said that it is not transferring its lands, what would we be doing? We would be creating a 5,000-acre park. What are we doing there? We are taking 5,000 acres of class 1 farmland out of a proposed international airport. We are setting it aside for farmers and preserving it so that they can farm forever.

By voting against this, the opposition would not be voting against a greater Rouge park; they would be voting in favour of holding this

land for an international airport. They can separate the two issues. If they support farmers and they support the environment, then they will support this bill, at the very least because it would take 5,000 acres of federal land out of a potential international airport and preserve and protect it forever.

● (1335)

At the very least they can support that, and we could all work on the framework and final management plan that would support all of the goals of farmers and environmentalists.

Mr. Dan Harris (Scarborough Southwest, NDP): Mr. Speaker, an NDP government would protect a lot more than what this government is prepared to protect. With respect to the proposed Pickering airport, which was a travesty when it was first introduced, successive Liberal and Conservative governments have never taken the action to correct that terrible mistake.

The proposed bill would include part of some land, but a lot of the land that would be there is missing.

I want to touch specifically on one of the comments that the member made. We should be looking to have a fantastic park that keeps farmland producing food locally and that also maintains or exceeds current standards.

The parliamentary secretary was upset that the province asked them to do what the province has never done, but is that not the definition of maintaining or exceeding current standards?

Mr. Paul Calandra: Mr. Speaker, obviously we are angry that the province never elevated its protection of the Rouge Park. That is why we brought forward a plan that would do that in the context of an urban setting, where highways, landfills, and zoos actually exist.

That is why we brought forward a plan that would have 12 additional protections that do not exist in the park right now.

That is why we have done what Ian Buchanan, of York region, said we should do, which is to bring it under one management window so that people know what they can and cannot expect in the park.

That is why there will be 24 hours, 7 days a week, 365 days a year protection and enforcement in the park, which does not exist now.

That is why there will be no mining in the park, and before they say that there are no mines, there are. There are aggregate mines in the park. That would stop under our plan.

That is why we would provide \$140 million to upgrade the protection of the natural heritage of the area, which does not exist currently.

That is why we would remove 5,000 acres from a potential airport and put it under the protection of Parks Canada.

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We are going to do all of these things. The only thing we are not doing is listening to the opposition that suggests we need to evict farmers at the same time. We will not do that. We will protect the environment. We will protect the farmers. We will protect the thousands of jobs and billions of dollars of economic activity that are present in the area. We are going to do it, despite the fact that the Ontario Liberal government will not help us with that.

• (1340)

Hon. John McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member has given a classic demonstration of why there is no consensus on the bill, even though consensus could easily have been achieved.

When he says, “We will not listen to the opposition, or anyone else for that matter. We will not take any lessons from the opposition, or anyone else for that matter”, he is absolutely right. He is right, and everyone else is wrong.

It does not matter that quotes are out of context. It does not matter that there is a perverse rendition of history. It does not matter that successive Liberal and Conservative governments, both at the provincial and the federal level, have set aside lands and have worked toward the park. It does not matter that a number of NGOs have worked to create this park. Without that work over the last 30 years, we would not even be having this debate because the whole thing would be paved over.

Therefore, I say to those who support the hon. member: With friends like this, they do not need enemies.

Mr. Paul Calandra: Mr. Speaker, let us look back and see what the hon. member has accomplished in his time in government with respect to the Rouge. He has accomplished nothing.

However, he comes in to the House and pretends that he supports farmers. He used to be a farmer himself, so he supports them. However, how does he do that? It is by suggesting that taking 2,000 acres of prime farmland out of production is good for farmers. It is by telling them what they should farm, how they should farm, and where they should farm, that it is good for farmers, not to worry. He does it by presenting petitions in the House that call for the elimination of 2,000 acres. He is suggesting that it is great for farmers.

Let us look at what the Liberals have accomplished. They have accomplished nothing. It was Brian Mulroney and a Conservative government that initially set aside the \$10 million. The Liberals had 13 years in office to bring forward a Rouge national park bill. Did they? No, they needed that extra year. It is like everything that the Liberals do.

Now, what are they doing? They are playing the worst kind of politics. They are stopping the protection of the Rouge for completely political reasons, despite the fact that the community wants it and farmers want it, and despite the fact that there is money set aside to accomplish it. They are playing silly, stupid political games, and the people of Ontario will not be fooled by this, just as they are no longer fooled by the provincial Liberal government.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Hélène LeBlanc (LaSalle—Émard, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the member made many references to the agricultural community that

currently exists within the Rouge park, and he spoke about two different sectors. I am still trying to learn more about this project, and I have not had the opportunity to visit Rouge park.

Given that the land he spoke about is used for farming, I would like to know whether the farmers are currently taking measures to preserve the waterways, meaning the Rouge watershed and other waterways.

I would like to know whether the farmers currently have buffer strips or whether they are using practices to control erosion. Does he know whether the farmers there are currently using such practices?

• (1345)

[*English*]

Mr. Paul Calandra: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate that the member has not had a chance to visit the area, but she is right; there are two very different zones. There is the southern part of the park, which contains most of the natural heritage and the beauty that we would expect in a national park. In the northern part of the park, which is the federal lands, it is all class 1 farmland. It is probably the most productive farmland in all of Canada.

The farmers are willing to participate in protecting and preserving the environment in this area. It is in their best interests to do so, but they want to be on equal footing with the environmentalists in the area. They do not want to see what has happened in the Bob Hunter Memorial Park happen to them.

Are they willing to reforest along certain areas? Yes. Are they willing to look at those lands that they cannot farm and provide reforestation in those areas? Absolutely. Are they willing to take half of the land that they currently farm and reforest it? No, they are not. If they do that and accept the standards that the opposition is talking about, they have said it is a death by a thousand cuts.

We have seen this. In the southern part, where this has been done, there are virtually no farmers left in that area. That would be completely disastrous to the economy in my riding. It would lose thousands of jobs for young people and for farmers, and it would take billions of dollars of economic activity out of my riding. I would never support that.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Hélène LeBlanc: Mr. Speaker, the parliamentary secretary partially answered my question.

This is what I wanted to know. Farming practices protect farmland from erosion and waterways from rising phosphorous and nitrogen levels.

I asked the member whether the farmers there, especially in the northern part, have buffer strips. Are the farmers ensuring that the phosphorous and nitrogen from their farmlands along the waterways do not find their way into the water? Is that kind of practice already in place? The member also seemed to say that they were prepared to do more.

[*English*]

Mr. Paul Calandra: Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for that question because it is very important. I am sorry that I did not completely answer it.

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Because these farmers have been on one-year leases, they have not been able to make any of the investments that the member is talking about. There are a lot of investments that they would like to make in this area, but they are not certain whether they will be farming next year. They have been forced into a type of farming that they do not want to do. They want to provide drainage ditches and reforestation in certain areas where it makes sense. They want to be part of a long-term goal to improve the environment and the climate of the area.

Bearing this in mind, it has been farmed for over 400 years and it is still the most productive farmland in all of Canada. It is still considered class 1 farmland, and that is basically under the stewardship of these very same farmers. They are willing to be a part of this, but they do not want to be told what to do, where to do it, and how to do it. They want to be there for a long time and have their tenancies guaranteed. This bill would allow them to do that.

Mr. Dan Harris (Scarborough Southwest, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I will be sharing my time.

New Democrats want to make sure that we get this park right. That means ensuring that ecological integrity and conservation are our top priorities for the Rouge urban park. However, this does not mean that we want to kick out farmers and it does not mean that we do not want to ensure that we are producing as much food locally for the greater Toronto area as possible, because that both makes common sense and is good for the environment.

We just heard the parliamentary secretary talking about how farmers have not been able to make investments over time to ensure they are following best practices for their own ecological integrity. Of course, we would support measures that would help farmers make those investments and give them the opportunity to improve their land. We want to see protection of the park and the entire region expanded and improved to ensure that the Rouge park and its farmers are there for many generations to come, for the benefit of both the city of Toronto and the greater Toronto area as well as for everyone who eventually goes to the park and enjoys it.

We recognize the decades of hard work and dedication from all community members who have worked tirelessly to protect the existing parklands and conceptualize the national park, and the NDP supports the creation of a Rouge national urban park, but not if it means compromising the protection of our environment. It is too risky a precedent to set for any potential future national urban parks that might be created, because this park is going to be the template on which any future potential parks will be based. That is why we are opposing Bill C-40 at third reading.

At the same time, we will be proposing a new bill that would fix the rollbacks of parks protection that the Conservatives have brought forward. It will build on the positive direction in which Bill C-40 started and would strengthen it based on the feedback and testimony that we heard from witnesses during the committee stage so that we can seek a consensus on the creation of this national urban park. We believe that such an approach would help to break the logjam with the province and the local stakeholders in this process, and ensure that the park is created in the best possible way.

The local community has said that we need better legislation to ensure the Rouge is maintained for future generations. The creation of Canada's first urban national park will set the precedent on how

we protect ecologically sensitive land in urban settings in the future. It is imperative that we get this concept right. The government can create all the parks it wants, but without funding and careful protection of the ecological integrity of these and all national parks, the designation is relatively meaningless in terms of conservation.

We listened to expert testimony and proposed 18 different amendments to create a more robust legislative framework for Bill C-40. We were extremely disappointed—but, sadly, not surprised—that the Conservatives have once again shown their unwillingness to listen to stakeholders and work with the other parties to create legislation that represents all of the interests of those involved. That is why we are creating a new bill. The new bill will be in the name of our MP for Scarborough—Rouge River.

We want to see the creation of a park, but we are not going to settle for substandard environmental protections. We will continue to work hard to see the creation of a Rouge national urban park. We will work toward good, strong environmental policies that prioritize ecological integrity and the maintenance of farmland, ensuring the best possible protection of our precious Carolinian forests and watersheds, while working with the agricultural community to ensure the continuation of sustainable farming and local food production in the park.

To summarize, we have been through a process in debating this bill, first at second reading, when multiple petitions were presented that called on the government to act in a certain way. We actually had more consensus at the beginning of the process, but because of the unwillingness of government members to work with other stakeholders, institutional and government support has slowly but surely fallen away from this bill as this process has gone on, as the bill fails to meet the standards that we all believe should be there to ensure ecological integrity, sustainable farming, and protection of our watersheds. A pipeline that goes across the area and multiple highways and roads and infrastructure all add challenges that have to be taken into consideration.

● (1350)

However, in the creation of this park, we also have a golden opportunity to establish worldwide international best standards with respect to the interaction of the environment and infrastructure, with respect to the environment and farming, and with respect to the interaction of people, human beings, within sensitive ecological areas. We could look to making best practices there, taking what already exists around the world in order to make the best park with the best protection. It would be the kind of template we would be proud to pass along to other parks and other urban areas in the future, because 80% of Canada's population lives in urban centres already, and the importance of having ecological lands, forests, watersheds, and other aspects of nature in and around these urban centres will continue to increase.

Statements by Members

With a growing population, we also need to make sure that we are producing more food locally. This is why we are also upset that the government has continued down the path of past Conservative and Liberal governments in failing to correct the mistake made in evicting of many farmers in the expropriation of land for Pickering airport. There we have tens of thousands of acres of prime agricultural land that should be farmed locally, land that should be producing food for the greater Toronto area. It should be protected for generations to come so that the farmers there could rest assured that sustainable best practices are in place to make sure they are not causing any problems for the surrounding environment and that they are the most productive that they can be and can pass those farms along to future generations who can continue to feed the growing population in the greater Toronto area, which is already well over five million people.

When we factor in areas further than that, within the Hamilton area, we are looking at many more people. A large chunk of Canada's population is found in southwestern Ontario and southern Ontario, so the more food we are able to grow locally, the less environmental impact our food supplies will create. When food from distant places is shipped across a continent or across an ocean, enormous resources are used to get that product to market.

Whether our resources are appropriately priced is an entire discussion altogether, but we can all agree that locally produced food makes good sense for the economy and good sense for families, and it certainly makes good sense for the environment. The government is missing an opportunity to protect tens of thousands of acres of land that was expropriated for the creation of Pickering airport. There are other areas where we can expand airport capacity so that we do not have to lose that prime agricultural land.

The parliamentary secretary kept going on and on about the importance of making sure that farming continues to exist in that area, but where is that member when it comes time to have the discussion about reversing the terrible decision to expropriate that land 40 years ago, which resulted in farmers being on one-year leases ever since?

I and several colleagues have visited many of those farms. We participated in day-long events where we actually got to understand and see what that area brings to the province of Ontario and to our local economy. It could only get better than that if those lands were protected. However, in that debate, the parliamentary secretary is nowhere to be found. He cares about a few farmers, but he does not really seem to care about the rest. It is our total food supply that has to be protected.

The bill falls far short of what we should be expecting and the kind of standards we should be exacting to make sure we have a Rouge national urban park that respects all the stakeholders: farmers, environmentalists, the local community, local governments, and everybody involved in that park.

• (1355)

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to pick up on the importance of what we are talking about in regard to a park.

There is an obligation on the government to work with the different stakeholders. It was very clear that not only did the

government not listen to the stakeholders, but when it had an opportunity at committee stage to try to improve upon the bill, the government once again refused to do that.

It is unfortunate, given the importance that Canadians put on our national parks, that the government lost the opportunity to provide government action that Canadians would support. The reason we believe the government has failed is that it has not worked with the people who are important to work with, whether those are the grassroots organizers of the park, the volunteers, or different levels of other governments. The member might want to comment on that.

Mr. Dan Harris: Mr. Speaker, the bill says that the minister “may” create an advisory committee, and this is one of the primary problems that we see with this legislation. We and many witnesses who came before the committee said that should be changed to the minister “shall” create an advisory committee to make sure that the local stakeholders are involved in future decisions and that they have an avenue to contact the minister who is going to be making the final decisions.

Especially in the climate of this Parliament, the opposition has very little trust that the current minister responsible for this file will make the proper decisions to make sure that the parkland is protected.

• (1400)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): The hon. member for Scarborough Southwest will have three minutes remaining for questions and comments when this matter returns before the House.

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

[English]

CANADA'S KIDS FOR A CURE AWARENESS DAY

Mr. Scott Andrews (Avalon, Ind.): Mr. Speaker, it is my pleasure to stand today and support JDRF Canada's Kids for a Cure Awareness Day. JDRF is the leading global organization and the largest charitable supporter focused on type 1 diabetes research. More than 300,000 Canadians suffer from this disease and face the devastating complications. This year's theme is “Step Up to Cure type 1 Diabetes”. It calls upon all parliamentarians to increase government funding for type 1 diabetes research and the expansion of the JRDF's Canadian clinical trial network. We must support the advancement of clinical trials and the cutting-edge treatment and technology that provide Canadians with the latest in diabetes breakthroughs.

There are 40 delegates and their families currently here in Ottawa meeting with parliamentarians. One of them is my friend Jordan Mayo and his mom June. I first met Jordan five years ago when he shared with me his story of growing up with type 1 diabetes, which has stuck with me ever since.

Statements by Members

JDRF and Jordan are doing their share. It is time for us to do ours.

* * *

GREAT WAR CENTENARY ASSOCIATION

Mr. Phil McColeman (Brant, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this year marks the centenary of the First World War, a war where 5,000 people from my community, from all walks of life, including soldiers from the Six Nations, stepped up to serve Canada. Thanks to the Great War Centenary Association of Brantford, Brant County and Six Nations, and its amazing group of volunteers, the stories of each and every one of those soldiers is being told. Together, they have committed countless hours, weeks and months researching each of these soldier's lives to find and preserve every piece of information they can about who they were, when they were enlisted, where they were deployed, any military honours they may have achieved, and much more. Now all of this information is catalogued and readily accessible to all at www.doingourbit.ca. It is a remarkable website that is part of a larger effort by the centenary association to tell the story of our World War I heroes.

We thank Geoffrey Moyer and his team for their incredible work.

* * *

[Translation]

VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

Ms. Mylène Freeman (Argenteuil—Papineau—Mirabel, NDP): Mr. Speaker, today is International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women and it kicks off a 16-day campaign to end gender-based violence.

Violence against women is a consequence of discrimination against women and is a testament to persisting inequalities. More than one in three of us will experience violence in our lifetime, with up to seven in ten women facing this reality in certain countries. Other types of discrimination increase the risk of violence. Aboriginal women in Canada are seven times more likely to die from violence. More than half of disabled women have been victims of physical violence.

[English]

Gender-based violence is not inevitable. We can prevent it by addressing factors that contribute to violence, like poverty, and by creating policies that respond to survivors.

We must establish a coordinated national action plan to address violence against women and encourage countries around the world to do the same, because it is long past time we put an end to violence against women and girls.

* * *

SPORTS DAY

Mr. John Weston (West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast—Sea to Sky Country, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to draw attention to the fact that this Saturday, November 29, is Sports Day in Canada. It has been running since 2009 to encourage Canadians to participate in sports as a fundamental part of our lifestyle. Over 1,800 local organizations, communities, and schools will mark the event celebrating sport this week. I encourage all members of the House

to find out what is going on in their home town and offer their support.

Our National Health and Fitness Day is partnering with a leader in this project, ParticipACTION, which offers grants of up to \$2,000 to participants to amplify the event plans. We expect try-it days, open houses, games, competitions, fun runs, and spectator events that celebrate sport at all levels.

Importantly, Friday is Jersey Day. This is a national day to show our love of sport by wearing a jersey to school, work or play. Like our Minister of State for Sport, we envision Canadians from sea to sea supporting sport in a proud and visible way.

I would ask members to wear their sports jersey Friday to do the same, tweet their picture with #jerseyday, and show their support for health and fitness in Canada.

* * *

● (1405)

ETHICS

Hon. Wayne Easter (Malpeque, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as MPs, privilege protects what we say here. It is critical that we all use that significant power responsibly and are careful not to ruin reputations with baseless slander.

Last week, the Conservative members for Wild Rose and Peace River, and even the Minister of Employment and Social Development, all attacked the Liberal candidate for Banff-Airdrie, Marlo Reynolds, for something he did not actually say. The comments had been broadcast by Sun News, but it turns out that these had been fed to it by a young Conservative spy. We now know the member of the public who did make the comments voted Conservative in the last election, but showed honesty and came clean. The member for Calgary Centre-North even went so far as to mock Marlo online for denying it was his voice on the tape.

Marlo Reynolds is an honourable man with an exemplary reputation and is owed an apology by all of these MPs. Sun News has published a full retraction today. Do these members have the decency to do the same? Will they apologize for misleading the House?

* * *

CANADA POST

Mr. Jeff Watson (Essex, CPC): Mr. Speaker, people are changing how they communicate, moving from letter to email and cheques to direct deposit. It is a seismic global shift, leaving postal agencies coping with massive losses.

Canada Post delivered 1.2 billion fewer letters in 2013 than in 2006. In the last 3 years, it lost millions, with losses forecast at a billion dollars per year by 2020.

Statements by Members

Postal agencies in the EU are closing post offices, slashing carrier jobs by up to 40%, privatizing or ending daily mail, and hiking stamp prices to \$1.40. By contrast, Canada Post's five-point plan proposes a return to viability without privatizing mail delivery, with lower stamp prices and job cuts of 11% to 13% by retirement, not by pink slip.

While the opposition and unions focus on maintaining the level of union dues under the guise of saving door-to-door delivery for just 33% of Canadians, Canada Post is fighting to save daily mail for 100% of Canadians.

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[Translation]

CO-OPERATIVES AND MUTUAL COMPANIES

Ms. Hélène LeBlanc (LaSalle—Émard, NDP): Mr. Speaker, Canada's co-operative and mutual sector is stronger than ever.

The members of our co-operatives work together in a way that is participatory, democratic and innovative to offer solutions to the challenges facing Canada. Whether we are talking about the next generation of workers or providing home care services, co-ops are present in every sector of our economy.

I encourage the federal government to get involved in this Canadian success story by supporting the creation of an investment fund to finance the development of co-operatives.

[English]

I would like to welcome the representatives of Co-operatives and Mutuals Canada on the Hill and invite all members to a special reception in their honour tonight at 5:30 p.m. in room 216-N of the Centre Block.

[Translation]

Together with our co-operatives, let us build a sustainable, fair economy that is 100% Canadian.

* * *

[English]

BIRTHDAY CONGRATULATIONS

Mr. Bob Zimmer (Prince George—Peace River, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Albert Flett, a constituent of mine from Chetwyn, B.C., was born in northwestern Alberta in 1914. His actual birthdate was never recorded, but he was assigned the day of August 21 by a Canadian Army recruiter in 1939.

He served Canada with distinction in World War II, leading his own platoon and achieving the rank of lance corporal. He still pledges allegiance to King George on Remembrance Day.

Albert worked for years in many jobs in B.C. and Alberta, from farm hand, to logging truck driver, to rodeo bull rider, until he retired from bull riding at 70 years young.

Throughout his time, he remained an active carpenter, and many of his works in and around Chetwyn are still in use today.

He met the love of his life, Pauline, in 1957. They eventually settled down in Chetwyn, staying together until her passing away in 2011.

Albert credits his longevity to staying close to his Métis heritage and says that he has the best of both worlds with a combination of modern and traditional medicine.

He remains immensely proud to be Canadian and I am told he is watching today from the assisted living quarters at the Chetwyn Hospital.

I congratulate Albert on his 100th birthday.

* * *

CALGARY NORTHEAST

Mr. Devinder Shory (Calgary Northeast, CPC): Mr. Speaker, two weekends ago the residents of Calgary Northeast were appalled when a 17-year-old girl was sexually assaulted while waiting at a bus stop.

Last Friday, I joined with over 300 community members from diverse backgrounds to show strong support for the victim, her family, and the entire neighbourhood at a Glow in the Dark Vigil, held at the same spot where the terrible assault took place.

I commend Taradale residents Karine Ruiz and Rochelle Christopher for organizing the vigil and I also thank Khalil Karbani, Noshy Karbani, Tonie Minhas, and the Taradale Community Association for assisting the organizers. I also thank the numerous Calgary Northeast community leaders, including Don Monroe from Skyview, Greg Steiner from Saddle Ridge, Gurinder Sidhu from Sikh Temple, and Rakesh Jaswal from the Hindu Society for their support to the community of Taradale.

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● (1410)

SRI LANKA

Ms. Rathika Sitsabaiesan (Scarborough—Rouge River, NDP): Mr. Speaker, as Canadians of Tamil heritage, in November, we commemorate two important events: Remembrance Day and Tamil Heroes Day.

This month symbolizes the beauty of life because we remember all of those who sacrificed their lives for the rest of us to live in peace and freedom. We remember that each and every one of the people who have been caught in the crossfire of war throughout the ages have embraced life over death, but those who made the ultimate sacrifice ensured that we who survived would be able to live with dignity and with liberties.

This month provides us with the occasion not only to remember and pay tribute to the heroes but also to reflect on the lessons of the struggle for justice, peace, and a life free from discrimination.

Sadly, on the island country of Sri Lanka where I was born as a child of war, the discrimination and injustices continue and the ethnic and religious minorities continue to live without peace and in fear.

Statements by Members

Let us always work for peace at home and abroad, and let us always support those who put their lives on the line. From the bottom of my heart, I am thankful to all.

Lest we forget.

* * *

VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

Mrs. Susan Truppe (London North Centre, CPC): Mr. Speaker, today is the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women, a day that provides a solemn reminder that violence against women affects us all.

Ending violence against women and girls is a top priority for our government. We have taken action by increasing support for victims of crime, including through the victims bill of rights.

I am proud of our government's action plan to address family violence and violent crimes against aboriginal women and girls, which will counter violent crimes against girls. It will provide support for shelters, and preventative activities will help establish a DNA database for missing persons. It addresses violence by supporting aboriginal skills and employment training initiatives.

It is also our government that passed historic legislation that gave aboriginal women living on first nation reserves the same matrimonial rights as all Canadians.

Let us remember today to take action in our own local communities that will end violence against women and girls in all its forms, now and throughout the year.

* * *

TAXATION

Ms. Chris Charlton (Hamilton Mountain, NDP): Mr. Speaker, Christmas is a time for giving. It is a time to think beyond oneself and to give to those who do not share equally in our country's great blessings.

I am pleased to stand in the House to pay tribute to the thousands of Hamilton Mountain residents and the millions of Canadians who will make a special effort this holiday season to give back to those who are less fortunate. Community organizations, church congregations, the Salvation Army, food banks, and others will lead the effort to make this festive season a true celebration for those who would otherwise go without this Christmas.

Sadly, that spirit of giving has not reached the government benches in the House. The Prime Minister, in particular, still has not learned that it is better to give than to receive. How else can we explain his recent announcement of income splitting? Although the program costs taxpayers \$4.9 billion, 86% of Canadians cannot benefit from it. Here is the kicker: the Prime Minister can.

In the spirit of the season, will the Prime Minister not reconsider? Why will he not help those who need help the most? Otherwise, Canadians may be forgiven for simply saying to him "Bah! Humbug!"

TAXATION

Mrs. Kelly Block (Saskatoon—Rosetown—Biggar, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our government has demonstrated time and time again that we make good on our promises. That is why we continue to cut taxes, saving the average family nearly \$3,400 this year. It is a record that we are proud many Canadian families have benefited from.

For example, millions of Canadians have benefited from the children's fitness tax credit and the enhanced universal child care benefit. Our government is continuing on its record with the family tax cut.

Knowledge Bureau president and *MoneySense* tax expert Evelyn Jacks has even said, "It begins to address the real economic cost of raising families in Canada."

This is not the time for tax and spend policies, like the Liberals have confirmed they would put forward. With measures like the family tax cut and the enhanced child care benefit, we are ensuring that our initiatives benefit every family with children in Canada. That is over 4 million families. Putting money back into the pockets of Canadians is our commitment, and we will continue to do so.

* * *

● (1415)

VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

Ms. Kirsty Duncan (Etobicoke North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, November 25 marks the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women and the start of the 16 days of action against gender violence. This is a time when Canadians join the international community in a commitment to ending the ongoing violation of women's most fundamental rights around the world.

Although we have made great progress in recent years, too many women in the world are still forced to live with the threat of physical, sexual, or emotional violence. In Canada, violence drives more than 3,000 women from their homes daily. It carries an incalculable human toll and costs Canadian society billions.

We must do better. On this international day, we once again call on the government to work with the provinces and territories and all stakeholders to develop a national action plan to end violence against women and girls, and hold a national inquiry into missing and murdered indigenous women and girls.

* * *

TAXATION

Mr. Jay Aspin (Nipissing—Timiskaming, CPC): Mr. Speaker, thanks to our new family tax cut and enhanced universal child care benefit, 100% of families with children in Nipissing—Timiskaming and across Canada will be better off. That includes working, stay-at-home and single parents, and one-earner and two-earner families. Indeed, all families with children will have more money in their pockets.

*Oral Questions***ORAL QUESTIONS**

[Translation]

Every parent will now receive nearly \$2,000 per child, but the Liberal leader is committed to reversing our tax relief so that he can spend their money the way he wants. Despite a Liberal leader who has positioned himself against middle-class families, I am proud that our government is giving money back to each and every family with children in Canada.

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[Translation]

AUDITOR GENERAL'S REPORT

Mr. Alain Giguère (Marc-Aurèle-Fortin, NDP): Mr. Speaker, today, the Auditor General of Canada submitted his latest report, and we all got a good look at the government's performance in several areas. The report is damning.

We already knew that the Minister of Veterans Affairs held back millions of dollars from his department and sent that money back to the treasury, but now we know that wait times at OSI clinics can be as long as four months.

We also learned that the Nutrition North Canada program has not reduced the cost of food for northern residents and is not properly targeting communities in need.

In addition, Library and Archives Canada spent \$15 million on a digital archiving strategy that never saw the light of day, and 98,000 boxes of archival records have not yet been processed.

Page after page and example after example, one thing is clear: the Conservatives are bad managers. Canadians deserve better.

* * *

[English]

PUBLIC SAFETY

Mr. John Carmichael (Don Valley West, CPC): Mr. Speaker, last night the CBC reported a misleading story on parliamentary security. It claimed that the increase in the terror level, which was widely reported on, was new information that should have been acted upon. It is clear that the security inside Parliament must be integrated with outside security forces.

A month ago, all outlets reported that security agency experts had raised the threat level and had stated that a terrorist attack could occur. As a result of the threat level being raised, law enforcement notified its partners to make them aware so they could adjust their security protocols.

Since 2009, our government has increased the budget for the RCMP's presence on Parliament Hill by more than \$16 million, allowing the RCMP to double its presence on the Hill.

We have full confidence in our security agencies and law enforcement, who are working around the clock to protect us.

VETERANS AFFAIRS

Ms. Megan Leslie (Halifax, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Auditor General's report is definitive. The Conservatives have failed to provide our veterans with speedy access to mental health care. In some cases, veterans wait up to eight months. The auditor says that is way too long, especially considering the number of veterans who have committed suicide.

How can the minister justify sending \$1 billion back to the treasury and firing staff when there are such desperate needs?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Auditor General said:

Veterans Affairs Canada has put in place important health supports for veterans, and the Department is providing timely access to the Rehabilitation Program.

Furthermore, 94% of veterans are eligible for the disability benefits program. The Auditor General noted that the process for the program is slow and complex, and the department has accepted his recommendations.

● (1420)

[English]

Ms. Megan Leslie (Halifax, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Conservatives failed to act and they have failed our nation's veterans.

Now the Auditor General is reporting that:

...Veterans Affairs Canada is not adequately facilitating timely access to mental health services.

The Conservatives even failed to assess whether their mental health strategy was helping veterans at all.

Last year, the Leader of the Opposition asked the Prime Minister if he would make this a personal priority. Why has the Prime Minister failed to do so? Why have the Conservatives failed our veterans?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, let us be accurate in terms of what the Auditor General said.

He looked at two government programs. He noted that Veterans Affairs has put in place important health supports for veterans. In the case of the rehabilitation program, he observed that it is working well. In the case of the disability benefits program, 94% of veterans are being found eligible for those mental health supports.

The Auditor General did note that the process is unnecessarily long and difficult. For that reason, the department has accepted those recommendations.

* * *

NORTHERN DEVELOPMENT

Ms. Megan Leslie (Halifax, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is time to stop the excuses and start getting help to our veterans.

Oral Questions

The Auditor General also reported that help provided through the Nutrition North program to offset sky-high food prices may be ending up in the wrong pockets. The department does not even determine whether northern families are actually benefiting.

This is about helping people who now pay over half their monthly income on food. Why have the Conservatives failed to track retailers and ensure that this program is helping northern families who are struggling to make ends meet?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Once again, Mr. Speaker, a full recitation of the facts is a little bit different.

As has been noted, there has been about a 25% increase under Nutrition North in the shipping of healthy foods to the north, something we are spending over \$60 million a year on. The price of the average family food basket has dropped by about 6%.

The Auditor General has noted that there needs to be better information in place to monitor performance of the program in some aspects. The ministry has obviously accepted those recommendations.

* * *

[Translation]

LIBRARY AND ARCHIVES CANADA

Mr. Peter Julian (Burnaby—New Westminster, NDP): Mr. Speaker, that is not all.

Library and Archives Canada is buried under 98,000 boxes of material waiting to be archived. Some have been gathering dust for more than 10 years. The Conservatives spent \$15 million on an electronic archiving system. Today we learned that it was shelved in 2012. It is gathering dust along with the 98,000 boxes waiting to be archived.

Can the Conservatives explain this monumental disaster?

Hon. Shelly Glover (Minister of Canadian Heritage and Official Languages, CPC): Mr. Speaker, first of all, we would like to thank the Auditor General for his report.

Library and Archives Canada will definitely be accepting the recommendations made. All the issues raised date back to the tenure of the former librarian and archivist of Canada.

He was replaced by Dr. Guy Berthiaume, who has a plan to eliminate the backlog by December 2015. We expect him to move forward with his work.

* * *

[English]

CANADA REVENUE AGENCY

Mr. Peter Julian (Burnaby—New Westminster, NDP): Mr. Speaker, here is another shocking story where the government has failed Canadians.

A few minutes ago, we learned of another massive privacy breach at the CRA. Hundreds of prominent Canadians had their personal, private financial information leaked.

The Canada Revenue Agency has a duty to protect confidential tax information, even from other government departments. When

Canadians hand over their private information, they expect it to be kept secure. Why are Conservatives failing to keep the private, confidential tax information of Canadians safe?

Hon. Kerry-Lynne D. Findlay (Minister of National Revenue, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this privacy breach is extremely serious and completely unacceptable. I have instructed the CRA to investigate the situation, and I can confirm the Privacy Commissioner has been notified.

Measures are being taken to notify, support and protect individuals affected by this breach. Our government understands that Canadians expect their personal information to be protected when dealing with all government departments and agencies.

* * *

• (1425)

VETERANS AFFAIRS

Mr. Justin Trudeau (Papineau, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we have a sacred obligation to our veterans, but too many are struggling alone against mental illness. The Auditor General has concluded that the government is failing them. Since 2006, 128 veterans have waited three to seven years to find out if they even qualify for mental health benefits.

How could the Prime Minister let this happen?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, once again, that is not completely accurate. What the Auditor General has said is that he examined the mental health program. He said that the government had good programs, one in particular, rehabilitation programs being delivered in a timely manner. In the case of the disability benefits program, 94% of applicants are being found eligible.

However, the hon. member is right to observe that in some cases it has taken a long time, through a difficult and cumbersome process that is not necessary. The department recognizes that and for that reason the department will implement recommendations to improve those processes.

Mr. Justin Trudeau (Papineau, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, in the past decade, we have lost more men and women in uniform to suicide than we did in Afghanistan.

The Auditor General's report said that mental health support for our veterans was very slow, complex, poorly communicated, not tracked and not comprehensive enough.

Why would the Prime Minister deliberately underspend over a billion dollars in funding for our veterans?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, of course, the Auditor General's report does not suggest there is underspending in the area of mental health, by any means. It does suggest that in one of the programs the delivery is far too slow and complicated. The department will accept those reports.

Oral Questions

In terms of lapsed funding, the government does not know at the beginning of the year how much money will be owed to veterans. It obviously responds to applications by providing more than enough funding. We ensure that veterans are paid in full every year.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Justin Trudeau (Papineau, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, for almost a year now, Jenifer Migneault has been trying to explain to the Conservatives that their mental health support system is dysfunctional, but the minister refuses to listen.

Today, we see that the Auditor General is of the same opinion.

When will the Prime Minister acknowledge the solemn obligation to support and honour our veterans?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, that is not the whole truth.

The Auditor General said that the government has put in place important health supports for veterans, despite opposition from the Liberals and the NDP. Access to rehabilitation programs is timely. As far as the disability benefits program is concerned, 94% of veterans are deemed eligible, but the process is slow and complicated. That is why the department accepted these recommendations for improving the program.

* * *

[*English*]

NOTHERN DEVELOPMENT

Mr. Dennis Bevington (Northwest Territories, NDP): Mr. Speaker, in June 2013, six NDP MPs called upon the Auditor General to audit the Nutrition North program. He did and found a program in deep trouble, underfunded, improperly assessed, out of control. He found that aboriginal affairs could not tell if the program was really bringing down the cost of food in Canada's north. He also indicated that the program was unfairly distributed to many families and many communities.

Could the minister defend, in any way, the lack of management of this vital program for northerners?

Hon. Bernard Valcourt (Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the NDP may choose to criticize the bureaucrats who administered the program, but the results are clear.

Under the Nutrition North program, the average volume of healthy food being shipped to these communities has gone up by almost 25% in the first two years of the program. Furthermore, for a family of four, the food basket has gone down by \$110 a month. That is significant.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Romeo Saganash (Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik—Eeyou, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the nutrition north Canada program is not achieving its objective. Many people in the north spend half their paycheque on groceries. This is untenable. Despite a \$60 million contribution, the program does not seem to be lowering the cost for the consumer. Who is pocketing the profits?

The people of the north have been telling the minister that the new program is flawed ever since it was implemented. Why is the

minister doing nothing to ensure that the people of the north have access to healthy food at affordable prices? Why is he abandoning them yet again?

● (1430)

Hon. Bernard Valcourt (Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, to continue with what I was saying about the progress we have achieved and the success of the program, I want to point out that we announced a few days ago that we would increase the subsidy for the program in question under economic action plan 2014. Next year, some \$133 million in subsidies will be allocated to perishable food in the north. Northerners are the ones who will benefit.

* * *

GOVERNMENT ACCOUNTABILITY

Ms. Peggy Nash (Parkdale—High Park, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Auditor General has criticized the Conservatives' lack of transparency regarding the automotive sector. Billions of dollars were spent, but we do not know where it went. The Auditor General himself is not able to determine whether the money spent truly went towards protecting the jobs of auto workers.

Why do the Conservatives refuse to be accountable? Why do they refuse to tell Canadians what they did with that money?

Hon. James Moore (Minister of Industry, CPC): Mr. Speaker, that is not the case at all. The Auditor General said that this industry is essential to Canada's future. The automotive industry is essential to Ontario and to Canada.

[*English*]

We make no apologies for investing in and protecting Canada's automobile industry. The investments that we made protected tens of thousands of jobs in the province of Ontario and secured Canada's auto sector for the future. If my hon. colleague does not believe that, she should talk to her colleagues from Windsor West and Windsor—Tecumseh, who have praised this government for the action that we took to protect Canada's auto industry.

Ms. Peggy Nash (Parkdale—High Park, NDP): Mr. Speaker, Conservatives are spending public money, and they cannot even keep track of where it is going.

They earmarked \$4 billion to ensure that General Motors Canada could meet its pension obligations. Very good, but when it became clear it did not need the full amount, they sent \$1 billion Canadian to the parent company in the U.S. Could he give us a clear answer? What exactly was the \$1 billion spent on?

Hon. James Moore (Minister of Industry, CPC): Mr. Speaker, all the funds were spent to secure Canada's auto footprint for the future, and my hon. colleague knows that. The money that was loaned to these firms has been paid back to the Canadian taxpayer as an investment by the Government of Canada into the auto sector. We have secured Canada's manufacturing base in the auto sector well into the future.

Oral Questions

Ken Lewenza, president of the Canadian Auto Workers, commended the federal government for its commitment to the auto industry. He said, “ This will ensure that the Canadian industry is protected....”

We know the NDP is a wholly owned subsidiary to the Canadian Auto Workers. Maybe they should pay attention and listen to them on this file.

* * *

VETERANS AFFAIRS

Mr. Malcolm Allen (Welland, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am interested in the industry minister's comment, because Industry Canada has lost \$1 billion and cannot tell us where it went. It has no idea where it went. It went to the States? Who knows?

That is just one of many programs. It is a theme across the front bench. They constantly say it is the bureaucrats or it is somebody else's problem, but it is not their problem; they are only ministers. “I'm only the Prime Minister”, he says over there.

At the end of the day, the Auditor General clearly said they are failing veterans. Can someone over there, just anyone, stand up with a little humility and say to veterans across this country, “We are sorry for what happened to you and we will make it better?”

Hon. Rob Nicholson (Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am sorry the NDP has never voted for an initiative that would help veterans in this country. I am very sorry about that.

I hope the hon. member—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order, please. The minister now has the floor, and he is attempting to answer the question, but there is so much noise that I can hardly hear the answer.

The hon. Minister of National Defence has a few seconds left to finish.

• (1435)

Hon. Rob Nicholson: Mr. Speaker, I said that it is very unfortunate that the NDP has never supported any of the initiatives that would help veterans in this country.

I point out to the hon. member that he should have a look at the section where the Auditor General says that Veterans Affairs has a robust mental health strategy, has put in place important mental health supports, provides rehabilitation to Canadian veterans in a timely manner, and is working to improve consultation with Canadian veterans.

We are getting the job done.

* * *

CANADA REVENUE AGENCY

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, another day, another massive privacy breach at the Canada Revenue Agency. This time, people at the CRA mailed the personal financial information of hundreds of Canadians—prominent Canadians—to the media. What were they thinking? This sort of loosey-goosey attitude toward the private financial information of Canadians is a

pattern with the current government, and leaves Canadians open to identity theft and fraud.

Why is this minister wasting resources going after birdwatchers and environmentalists rather than ensuring the basic competency of people in her department? Why will she not take some responsibility for a change?

Hon. Kerry-Lynne D. Findlay (Minister of National Revenue, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this privacy breach is extremely serious and completely unacceptable. I have instructed the CRA to investigate this situation, and the Privacy Commissioner has been fully informed. Measures are being taken to notify, support, and protect individuals affected by the breach.

We know in this government, as all Canadians do expect, that their information should be protected when dealing with all government departments and agencies. We take it seriously and we are taking steps.

Mr. Alexandre Boulerice (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, every time it is so serious, but it happens again and again.

[*Translation*]

Privacy breaches have become business as usual under the Conservatives.

This time, the breaches targeted public figures who generously donated works to art galleries or museums, as though they deserved to have their addresses disclosed simply because they donated a part of their legacy for the public good.

When will the Conservatives stop taking these problems lightly and when will they treat privacy as a fundamental issue?

[*English*]

Hon. Kerry-Lynne D. Findlay (Minister of National Revenue, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this is a fundamental issue. We do take it seriously, as I have said. It is completely unacceptable to have private information go out publicly. We are looking into this situation. The Privacy Commissioner has been fully informed. We are taking all measures necessary and possible to support and protect the individuals who may be affected by this breach.

Our government understands that Canadians expect their information to be protected, and we take action on that every day.

*Oral Questions***HEALTH**

Ms. Libby Davies (Vancouver East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, for over 50 years the survivors of thalidomide have been forced to struggle alone. Successive federal governments have failed to support survivors and address the wrong. We will never know how many lives were devastated because of the decision to allow this drug in Canada, but the least we can do now is to provide adequate support and compensation to the 95 remaining survivors.

Does the minister agree that we all have a responsibility to show support to meet the needs of thalidomide survivors?

Hon. Rona Ambrose (Minister of Health, CPC): Mr. Speaker, of course this was an incredibly tragic event. While it happened in the 1960s, it reminds us all every day about the importance of drug safety.

While there was a settlement in the 1990s, I understand there are ongoing health issues that these victims are experiencing. I have reached out to their organization, and I look forward to meeting with them and reviewing their proposal.

Ms. Libby Davies (Vancouver East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, on Thursday the House will have the opportunity to debate this critical issue, and I hope that all members, including the minister, will show their support. Innocent people suffered because a system that was supposed to keep them safe made a terrible decision.

Thalidomide survivors have shown incredible resilience and resourcefulness, but they cannot fight this battle alone any longer. They need our support and they deserve our support. Will the minister agree to take the necessary and important steps to right the wrong?

Hon. Rona Ambrose (Minister of Health, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as I said, everyone in this House and across Canada recognizes the incredible tragedy of what happened in the 1960s, and it reminds us every day why we have to have the strongest drug safety system in the world. We are striving to do that under this government.

As I said, I have reached out to this organization. Its members have already met with my officials, and I look forward to meeting with them in person to review their proposal.

* * *

● (1440)

VETERANS AFFAIRS

Mr. Frank Valeriote (Guelph, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Auditor General's report shows the government is failing to provide the mental health services our veterans need and deserve. Refusing to provide timely access to those services is undeniable. One in five applicants for mental health care and other services are waiting upwards of eight months just for an approval. That is double the department's benchmark. Also, because it does not collect data, the government cannot even demonstrate that services are even effective.

Why have the Conservatives short-changed our veterans by over a billion dollars instead of investing the funds needed for adequate mental health services?

Hon. Rob Nicholson (Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member has it completely wrong. We are prepared

to accept all of the recommendations of the Auditor General, and we thank the Auditor General for the welcoming remarks he made with respect to how Veterans Affairs treats its veterans.

That said, I was very pleased to announce, with my colleague the Minister of Veterans Affairs, eight new operational stress injury clinics in Halifax, St. John's, Chicoutimi, Pembroke, Brockville, Kelowna, Victoria, and Montreal. There will be access to mental health services for members, veterans, and their families.

Mr. Frank Valeriote (Guelph, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, picture this: veterans, reluctant to come forward and ask for help because of the stigma of mental illness, being put through a slow, painful, and complex process.

An eleventh hour announcement is a cynical exercise of damage control in the face of scathing criticism. Conservatives knew veterans needed help. It is too little, too late.

Veterans are forced to wait months for a case manager. They are forced to wait months for access to mental health benefits. Is this government really waiting for another tragedy before acting?

Hon. Rob Nicholson (Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, what is cynical is what the Liberal Party has done. It wants to do nothing. It does not support any of the efforts we have made.

I would just point out to the hon. member that Veterans Affairs has spent over \$30 billion delivering benefits to veterans. This is \$5 billion more than the previous Liberal government in the decade of darkness. The hon. member should get on board and start supporting what we are doing for veterans in the country.

[Translation]

Mr. Marc Garneau (Westmount—Ville-Marie, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Auditor General's report is clear. While the department put a mental health strategy in place, it has no way of knowing if it is working.

Our veterans would say that it is not working. If a strategy is put in place and we want to know whether it is working, it needs to be assessed from time to time. The government did not do that.

When will the Conservatives take our veterans' mental health seriously?

[English]

Hon. Rob Nicholson (Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in fact it was our government and the department and the minister that asked the Auditor General for a third party review of Veterans Affairs' existing mental health system in the country.

What the Auditor General found was that Veterans Affairs has a robust mental health strategy in place with important mental health supports that provide rehabilitation to Canadian veterans in a timely manner, and it is working to improve consultation with Canadian veterans.

Oral Questions

This is exactly what we want. This is what they deserve.

* * *

[*Translation*]

JUSTICE

Ms. Françoise Boivin (Gatineau, NDP): Mr. Speaker, speaking of flawed processes, Justice LeBel is preparing to retire, but the government still has not told us what process will be put in place to fill the vacant seat on Canada's top court.

What is more, since it is one of the three seats reserved for Quebec, the provincial government expects to be consulted, and rightly so. We hope that the Conservatives have at least remembered a little something about the fiasco surrounding Justice Nadon's appointment and will agree to broad consultations.

Will the Minister of Justice commit to consulting the Quebec government, and when will that consultation take place?

Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, CPC): Mr. Speaker, of course, we have always consulted our colleagues in Quebec's legal community and justice department. I have always talked with my colleagues in the legal community.

[*English*]

It is very important, as the member knows full well, that we have candidates coming forward that represent the merit and the characteristics that we look first and foremost to when making these appointments.

I can assure the hon. member that we are very aware of the timelines. We are very aware of the need to respect Quebec's complement on the Supreme Court of Canada.

* * *

PUBLIC SAFETY

Ms. Françoise Boivin (Gatineau, NDP): Mr. Speaker, there are lots of women of merit in Quebec, and I am not including myself necessarily, before he says something about it.

● (1445)

[*Translation*]

Yesterday the Minister of Public Safety refused to give a clear answer about the constitutionality of his bill to expand the powers of CSIS. He refuses to say whether the government's lawyers have looked into this issue or even whether the Minister of Justice has declared it to be constitutional.

Why does the minister refuse to answer this simple question? Is this the result of ignorance or incompetence?

[*English*]

Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the bill is clearly about protecting Canadians, first and foremost from terrorist acts, which are extremely serious and prevalent in other parts of the world, and they have arrived at our shores.

The Minister of Public Safety, in consultation with the Department of Justice, is moving forward on a number of legislative fronts. This

is always standard fare. We look to constitutionality. We look to charter compliance before presenting any bill before the House of Commons.

The member will want to support this legislation which will protect Canadians.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Rosane Doré Lefebvre (Alfred-Pellan, NDP): Mr. Speaker, Bill C-44, which seeks to expand the powers of CSIS, raises important questions concerning its constitutionality.

Despite these questions, the Conservatives are limiting the amount of time this bill will be given in committee. They do not even want to know what the Privacy Commissioner thinks of it.

Does the minister really think that four hours of testimony in parliamentary committee is enough for a bill on the Canadian Security Intelligence Service?

Hon. Steven Blaney (Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I doubt that Canadians would want us to spend six years on a bill that is seven pages long.

It was a pleasure for me to appear before the Standing Committee on Public Safety and National Security yesterday. I presented the bill's two objectives, which are very clear: to give our intelligence services the ability to operate outside Canada and to protect human sources, all, as I clearly explained yesterday, within the laws of Canada and in accordance with the Constitution.

I look forward to seeing the opposition participate in the examination of the bill and having it come back to the House so that it can become law and protect Canadians.

[*English*]

Mr. Randall Garrison (Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca, NDP): Mr. Speaker, this is getting absurd. The minister flat out refused to answer in committee yesterday when he was asked the simple question: "Was the constitutionality of Bill C-44 reviewed by justice department lawyers?" His answer: "Just trust us."

How can Canadians be expected to just trust the Conservative government when it has already weakened CSIS' oversight, and when it is limiting the study of Bill C-44 in committee to just four hours and three opposition witnesses? How can Canadians trust the government when the minister cannot or will not even answer basic questions about his own bill?

Hon. Steven Blaney (Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is clear, and the member should know, that every bill brought forward by the government is approved by the Department of Justice. It is under the Constitution.

This legislation would make the work of the agency more clear. It would bring clarity. That is exactly what the court has invited us to do. The member is fully aware of this.

I hope he will support this legislation, so we can get it back in the House and then to the Senate so it can become a law of the land. We need to protect Canadians against terrorist threats.

NATIONAL DEFENCE

Ms. Joyce Bateman (Winnipeg South Centre, CPC): Mr. Speaker, a sustainable reserve force, trained and equipped to meet the operational needs and challenges of the Canadian Armed Forces, is critical to operational success. Reservists are essential to Canada's security and the ability of our armed forces to succeed with international and domestic operations. Reservists have the unique challenge of balancing the demands of civilian careers with military duty.

Could the Minister of National Defence please update the House on the latest action that our government is taking to support Canada's reserve forces?

Hon. Rob Nicholson (Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, reservists play a vital role in the Canadian Armed Forces. They make valuable contributions both at home and abroad.

Today I am happy to announce the new compensation for employers of reservists program. This program will provide compensation to employers who grant their reservist employees leave to deploy on operational duty.

This is yet another example of our government enhancing programs and policies to ensure that Canadian reservists receive the widest possible support, care, and recognition, which they deserve for the vital contribution they make to this country.

* * *

POVERTY

Ms. Linda Duncan (Edmonton—Strathcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, 25 years after the House pledged to eliminate child poverty, and despite the oil boom, more than 140,000 Alberta children are still living in poverty. Almost half of the food bank users in my city alone are children. Many come from low-income working families, who struggle to pay rent, utilities, and child care on their meagre wages.

Why is the government refusing a request for deeper investments in child care and housing to ensure a better quality of life for all of our children?

•(1450)

Hon. Candice Bergen (Minister of State (Social Development), CPC): Mr. Speaker, the fact is that under our government child poverty has been reduced to an all-time low. Under the Liberals, it was over 18%. We have reduced it to just over 8%.

We recognize that there is more work to do. That is why we introduced the universal child care benefit, which the NDP called a slap in the face to parents. We call it a direct benefit to parents. Every parent in Canada will benefit from our expansion of the universal child care benefit, and our family tax cuts as well.

We will keep delivering funds into the pockets of Canadian families because we know that the NDP would take it away given the chance.

Mr. Matthew Kellway (Beaches—East York, NDP): Mr. Speaker, not every Canadian family benefits. Income inequality has become a hallmark of Canadian cities.

Oral Questions

The new report from TD Bank says that it is stunting our economic growth and threatening our long-term prosperity. The report identifies the damage done by the Liberal-Conservative tag team, together making the poor poorer and the rich richer. There are too many young people struggling for a foothold and too many families struggling to provide.

When economists around the world are advising governments to “lean against income inequality”, why are these guys always leaning the wrong way?

Hon. Candice Bergen (Minister of State (Social Development), CPC): Mr. Speaker, we have introduced a number of measures, including tax savings, so that parents and families are paying about \$3,500 less in taxes every year.

We have introduced a family tax cut, which will mean that over two million families will benefit, as well as our universal child care benefit. Every family in Canada with children under 18 years of age will benefit from this package.

It gives money directly to families, so that they can make decisions regarding career, as well as child care choices.

* * *

[Translation]

CONSUMER PROTECTION

Ms. Annick Papillon (Québec, NDP): Mr. Speaker, yesterday, MasterCard announced its intention to enter Canada's debit card market. Small and medium-sized businesses are concerned about this giant's arrival because they are worried that even more fees will be imposed, which will chip away at their modest profit margins.

Is the minister aware that his voluntary regulation is a joke can easily be avoided to the detriment of our SMEs? When will the government impose mandatory regulations regarding credit card fees?

[English]

Mr. Andrew Saxton (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we welcome the commitments, which represent a meaningful long-term reduction in costs for merchants that should ultimately result in lower prices for consumers as well.

Why is the NDP opposed to an approach that would see a reduction in VISA and MasterCard fees by approximately 10%? That is good for consumers and it is good for Canadians.

Mr. Glenn Thibeault (Sudbury, NDP): Mr. Speaker, Interac is one of the most cost-effective modes of payment in Canada, but that is now at risk with MasterCard's announcement to enter the debit market.

At every turn, voluntary rules in the financial sector are flouted and exploited. Letting credit card companies co-badge cards and enter the debit market is currently forbidden under this government's voluntary code, but that is not stopping the credit card companies.

Oral Questions

When will the minister recognize that his voluntary approach is not working, and when will he finally stand up for consumers and small businesses and put in place binding regulation that protects Canadians?

Mr. Andrew Saxton (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, unlike New Democrats who only talk about protecting consumers, it is our Conservative government that has taken action.

We have banned unsolicited credit card cheques, limited anti-consumer business practices, and ensured that pre-paid cards never expire. We have also introduced rules requiring clear disclosure of terms in credit card contracts and applications.

Sadly, New Democrats have opposed every one of our consumer protection measures.

* * *

VETERANS AFFAIRS

Ms. Joyce Murray (Vancouver Quadra, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, veterans seeking service are often in crisis, and yet the average wait time to get service at a mental health clinic, at an OSI clinic, is approximately three months. At many of the DND centres, it is almost three times the promised wait time.

This is caused by the government's failure to staff these services properly, and all the while it is clawing back billions of dollars from the departments of Defence and Veterans Affairs.

How can our serving men and women believe they are a priority for this government after all of the neglect and the deception?

• (1455)

Hon. Rob Nicholson (Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, that takes a lot of nerve, coming from the Liberals.

The operational stress injury clinic did not even exist under the Liberals. We have 18 of them, and I announced, with the Minister of Veterans Affairs, that we have eight new ones that will be opening up to support our veterans.

Why will the hon. member not start supporting them for a change? They did not do that in government, that is for sure.

Hon. Geoff Regan (Halifax West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Auditor General said that Veterans Affairs does not educate family members on possible signs of mental illness.

Is this because that if a veteran has PTSD, the government does not want to know?

Hon. Rob Nicholson (Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the clinics that we announced are actually in the city that the hon. member represents in Nova Scotia. Again, it is one more step in our efforts to better support veterans in this country.

We called in the Auditor General to look at all of these issues. We had a very good response in many different areas, and we will continue to implement all of them. Veterans deserve that.

[Translation]

LA FRANCOPHONIE

Mr. Pierre Dionne Labelle (Rivière-du-Nord, NDP): Mr. Speaker, next weekend, the heads of state will meet in Dakar for the 15th Sommet de la Francophonie to choose Abdou Diouf's successor.

Naturally, we support Michaëlle Jean's candidacy. She would be the first woman to take over as head of the Organisation internationale de la Francophonie. Unfortunately, Ms. Jean has to deal with Canada's poor track record when it comes to international co-operation.

Does the Conservative government realize that it is the main obstacle to Michaëlle Jean's candidacy?

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, we are pleased that the House unanimously supports Michaëlle Jean's candidacy, and we will find out this weekend whether our candidate gets the job.

Ms. Hélène Laverdière (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, we wish Ms. Jean the best of luck. We are convinced that she would make an excellent secretary general of La Francophonie.

In the meantime, the Prime Minister will be going to the Sommet de la Francophonie in a few days.

How will he respond to our many partners who no longer recognize Canada and who are concerned about its disengagement in terms of international co-operation, its disengagement in Africa, its withdrawal from the Kyoto protocol and its refusal to co-operate in multilateral organizations?

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, Canada is proud to be part of the worldwide francophone community. This is an excellent opportunity for our country to build economic and co-operative ties with all of these countries, and we will continue in that direction.

* * *

[English]

NATIONAL DEFENCE

Mrs. Patricia Davidson (Sarnia—Lambton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, today we recognize the outstanding work accomplished by our Canadian naval personnel by marking Navy Appreciation Day 2014.

Canada borders three separate oceans and has the world's longest coastline, making our navy incredibly important, both to our economy and for our security. Our ports are economic gateways and we rely on our navy to ensure that trade and commerce continues undeterred.

Oral Questions

Can the Minister of National Defence please update the House on how our government is supporting our navy on this important day?

Hon. Rob Nicholson (Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, yesterday I was proud to be in Halifax to announce that the HMCS *Fredericton* will soon be deployed as our first fully modernized frigate.

I would also like to again commend the efforts of the officers and crew of the HMCS *Toronto*, who, without hesitation, acted to put out a fire while making a port stop in Turkey.

On this Navy Appreciation Day, I thank the Navy League of Canada for its leadership in promoting maritime affairs across Canada.

On behalf of the government, I want to express our support and appreciation to the men and women who through dedication and professionalism exemplify the best qualities of the Royal Canadian Navy.

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NOTHERN DEVELOPMENT

Ms. Yvonne Jones (Labrador, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Auditor General has reported that the Nutrition North program is not providing affordable food to northern families. Instead, the funds are profiting others.

The program has no continuity, no defined eligibility, no assurances that the subsidy is being passed on, and no benefit to families, yet food prices are out of reach for most people in the north, as some pay double the cost of food over other Canadians.

Why is the minister not fixing this problem?

• (1500)

Hon. Bernard Valcourt (Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as I have said, maybe the member should read the report instead of misquoting it.

The results of this program are clear. Under Nutrition North, the average annual volume of healthy food to northern communities that has been shipped has gone up by approximately 25%.

Moreover, in the first two years of the program, the food basket for a family of four has come down by \$110 a month. That is significant.

* * *

THE ENVIRONMENT

Mr. Ryan Cleary (St. John's South—Mount Pearl, NDP): Mr. Speaker, 25 years ago, Placentia Bay, Newfoundland was identified as the highest potential area for an oil-related environmental accident in Canada.

Only last year, a federal tanker safety panel confirmed that Placentia Bay was at high risk for an oil spill. Now, the Atlantic Pilotage Authority wants tankers to navigate another 20 risky kilometres into the bay before being boarded by an experienced pilot. The danger is clear.

What is not clear is why the government is standing by and allowing the risk to increase. Why?

Mr. Jeff Watson (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Transport, CPC): Quite the contrary, Mr. Speaker. The member will know that a risk assessment is essential to be performed on any proposed changes like that, and a technical assessment is in fact under way.

The member should await the results of a technical assessment before he jumps to any conclusions on these matters.

* * *

THE ECONOMY

Mr. Robert Sopuck (Dauphin—Swan River—Marquette, CPC): Mr. Speaker, thanks to our Conservative government's low-tax plan, Canada has created over 1.2 million net new jobs since the depths of the global recession.

However, the global economy remains fragile and the constituents in my riding of Dauphin—Swan River—Marquette know that we must stay the course with our low-tax plan for jobs and growth.

Could the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance please update the House on what the world is saying about Canada's economy?

Mr. Andrew Saxton (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to report that once again the OECD has recognized that under this Conservative government, Canada's economy remains strong and continues to grow. According to the OECD's Economic Outlook released today, "Building on recent solid growth, real GDP in Canada is projected to accelerate through 2015".

What is more, the OECD reaffirmed that Canada has a sound fiscal footing under the leadership of our Prime Minister.

We know that when our economy is envied around the world and is underpinned by sound fiscal management, it is great news for all Canadians. After all, we know that budgets do not balance themselves.

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[*Translation*]

EMPLOYMENT

Mr. Jonathan Tremblay (Montmorency—Charlevoix—Haute-Côte-Nord, NDP): Mr. Speaker, for over a year now, youth employment centres have had their applications for funding from the skills link program rejected.

They are constantly grappling with uncertainty and confusion. Applications for projects to help unemployed youth have been gathering dust for the past 18 months.

Can the minister tell us what is going on with the skills link program and why applications from centres in my region have been rejected?

Hon. Jason Kenney (Minister of Employment and Social Development and Minister for Multiculturalism, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I do not have that file with me at the moment. My department pays out tens of thousands of grants.

Government Orders

Frankly, if the member really wants to get the facts during question period, then he should let me know about his question beforehand so that I can come with the information. I will get the information from my department, and I will be very happy to share it with the hon. member.

* * *

[English]

SENIORS

Mr. Bruce Hyer (Thunder Bay—Superior North, GP): Mr. Speaker, veterans and all seniors in Thunder Bay—Superior North are worried. My constituent, Louise Fisher, laments that, “Nothing is being done federally to ensure that quality services are available across Canada for our seniors.” For example, we have declining health care services and a lack of in-home support for our seniors.

When will the minister ensure that all of Canada's seniors are respected and supported?

Hon. Alice Wong (Minister of State (Seniors), CPC): Mr. Speaker, we have been promoting healthy, active aging by encouraging seniors to stay engaged and informed. We have information for seniors and their families, which is easy to access, to help seniors stay engaged in their communities.

It is our government that brought in the largest GIS increase in a quarter century, and the opposition voted against it. While we work to ensure the well-being of our seniors, the opposition continues to let seniors down and would take away money from seniors.

* * *

● (1505)

[Translation]

PRESENCE IN GALLERY

The Speaker: I would like to draw to the attention of hon. members the presence in the gallery of the recipients of the 2014 Governor General's Literary Awards: Linda Amyot, Raziel Reid, Marianne Dubuc, Jillian Tamaki, Daniel Poliquin, José Acquelin, Arleen Paré, Carole Fréchette, Jordan Tannahill, Michael Harris, Gabriel Nadeau-Dubois, Andrée A. Michaud and Thomas King.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear!

[English]

The Speaker: I would also like to draw to the attention of hon. members the presence in the gallery of six members of the Royal Canadian Navy who are taking part in Navy Appreciation Day today.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear!

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. Last week the Minister of Employment and Social Development, the member for Wild Rose and the member for Peace River made allegations in the House about the Liberal candidate for Banff—Aidrie that we now know are untrue.

I would kindly ask these members to rise in their place to withdrew these remarks.

The Speaker: It is not a point of order, so we will have to move on.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[English]

VETERANS HIRING ACT

The House resumed from November 17 consideration of the motion that Bill C-27, An Act to amend the Public Service Employment Act (enhancing hiring opportunities for certain serving and former members of the Canadian Forces), be read the third time and passed.

The Speaker: Resuming debate, the hon. member for Sault Ste. Marie has 15 minutes left for his remarks.

Mr. Bryan Hayes (Sault Ste. Marie, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Bill C-27, the veterans hiring act, would be another meaningful way for us to create new opportunities for eligible veterans and still-serving members to continue serving Canada through the federal public service. It would do this by giving veterans and still-serving members of the Canadian Armed Forces regular access to rewarding jobs in the federal public service.

First and foremost, it would create a statutory priority entitlement for those eligible men and women who were medically released from the military because of a service-related injury. These deserving men and women would be moved to the front of the hiring line in recognition of their service and sacrifice on behalf of Canada. It would assure us continued access to the talent of these men and women that Canada helped to train and develop in the first place.

I had an opportunity to live a portion of my father's 36-year career for 17 years before leaving home and I was fortunate to witness his exceptional leadership, management, problem solving and public speaking skills to some small extent. My older sister, also in the military, excelled in many areas, including purchasing and asset management, to name but a few. Her husband was an air frame technician for 20 years, while my youngest sister became fluent in the Russian language and used her knowledge to the benefit of Canada in postings to Alert on a couple of occasions.

All of these skills are transferable not only to the private sector but also to the public sector. All of my family transferred to the private sector, with the exception of my father who retired.

Government Orders

As a further testament to the skills learned, I want to provide a quote from Wayne Mac Culloch from the Canadian Association of Veterans in United Nations Peacekeeping. He said: "My own experience highlights the value that disabled veterans continue to be able to contribute to the public service and Canadians. I was medically released from the Canadian Armed Forces for service-related injuries in October 2008. Although I did not enjoy the level of priority being proposed in C-27, I was fortunate to turn my regulatory priority into an intermediate appointment in January 2011 and I have continued to rise in authority, accountability and responsibility. My knowledge, experience, ability to focus on priority issues, analytical excellence and agility in action, accrued through a wide variety of employment, are seen as having particular importance in today's government business operations. Re-engaging with a familiar workplace and pursuing meaningful employment has greatly increased my quality of life, while providing continued value to government and the Canadian public."

The bottom line is that Bill C-27 would be a win-win for our men and women in uniform, as well as the country they served so proudly.

Of course, the legislation would also build upon our government's extraordinary record of action on behalf of veterans, still-serving members and their families.

In fact, since 2006, our government has invested in a cumulative total of almost \$4.7 billion in new funding to enhance veterans' benefits, programs and services.

As the member for Edmonton Centre said during second reading of the bill, our government has been single-minded in doing everything it can to ensure veterans and their families have the care and support they need, when and where they need it. This included implementing the new veterans charter, with its immediate and long-term financial benefits for injured and ill veterans, as well as comprehensive medical, psychosocial and vocational rehabilitation services, health care benefits, mental health services and one-on-one case management for those who required such help.

It also means being there to help veterans with everything from the shovelling of their driveways in the winter and the cutting of their grass in the summer, to assisting them with housekeeping services year-round.

The program is necessary in order for my own mother to continue to live independently. On her behalf, I would like to thank Veterans Affairs and the veterans' independence program for their support. Part of the reasons for these programs are so individuals can live in their homes longer and are not a strain on the system.

In fact, the range of services available to veterans and their families extends from benefits and supports for modern day veterans and their families to long-term care and the funeral and burial program. It also includes our delivering on what all the available research tells us: a successful transition from the military often depends upon finding satisfying and rewarding new employment.

• (1510)

After all, the average age of a member releasing from the Canadian Armed Forces today is 37 years. These young men and women do not just want to start new careers, they also need to find

new careers. That is why we have developed a flexible new approach to our vocational rehabilitation services to provide up to \$75,800 for eligible veterans to pursue the new training they may need to gain employment when their time in uniform is complete. That is why we contributed \$150,000 to the Helmets to Hardhats Canada program, which is helping veterans find good paying jobs in the trades and construction industry. That is why we are actively encouraging employers across the country to place priority on hiring veterans. That is why we are working more closely than ever before with blue-chip partners, like the True Patriot Love Foundation and corporate Canada generally, to find innovative new ways to improve the transition process for veterans and their families.

For business leaders, the military world may seem difficult to understand and a little intimidating. That is why organizations such as True Patriot Love, the Treble Victor Group, Wounded Warriors Canada, and Veterans Affairs provide effective support to help facilitate understanding and to connect talented veterans with employers.

The Canada Company military employment transition, otherwise known as MET, brings together employers and veterans in an online marketplace and provides workshops about military culture, values, and structure in order to supply employers with an understanding of the applicability of military experience to the business world. The impact of MET, founded by Blake Goldring, chair and CEO of AGF Management Limited, can be seen through the experiences and results obtained by both Target Canada and Bell Canada.

Gabriel Granatstein, group manager and senior counsel of employee and labour relations at Target Canada, himself a veteran, secured the active support of senior management to establish Target Canada as a veteran friendly employer. A key step was to invite MET to hold workshops for Target Canada recruiters to help them understand the positive attributes skilled veterans bring to the workplace. Target Canada is now actively recruiting veterans and sponsoring MET workshops for other employers.

Government Orders

Kristine Emmett, vice president of organizational development at Bell, champions the value that veterans bring to Bell's business and sees MET workshops as an excellent means of educating recruiters. Ms. Emmett views MET as a "great business partner" that has helped Bell recruiters better understand the value of hiring veterans and reservists. MET has already conducted two workshops for Bell recruiters, and Ms. Emmett said that the MET program also provides Bell with the opportunity to post jobs on MET's Hot Jobs communication channel, which goes directly out to MET members. Walmart, Cenovus, Toronto Hospital for Sick Children, Queen's University, and CN Rail, all of which are veteran friendly employers.

That is why we introduced this important legislation, Bill C-27, because we are committed to leading by example. The merits of this legislation are well known and they have been repeated often. However, it is important that I remind the House what Bill C-27 proposes to do.

It would move eligible veterans to the front of the line for those jobs they are qualified to fill in the federal public service. This would be achieved by creating a five-year statutory priority entitlement for any members of the Canadian Armed Forces who would be releasing from the military because of a service-related injury or illness. Bill C-27 would also extend the existing priority entitlement period from two years to five years.

In addition, this legislation would create other hiring opportunities for honourably releasing veterans and still-serving members who want to start a new career in the federal public service. For example, if passed, this legislation would permit still-serving military personnel with at least three years of service, as well as veterans who are not employed full time in the public service, to compete for internally advertised positions within the federal public service. This eligibility would continue for a full five years after their honourable release from the Canadian Armed Forces.

Furthermore, Bill C-27 would also establish a hiring preference for veterans applying for externally advertised positions in the federal public service. This means is that if a veteran has been honourably released with at least three years of military service, and is equally qualified for the position at hand, he or she would be given hiring priority over all other eligible applicants.

• (1515)

These measures were designed to recognize that Canadian Armed Forces personnel and veterans who have served for three years have gained enough military knowledge and attributes to make them a clear asset to the federal public service. In addition, three years of military service demonstrates a sufficient commitment to Canada. It is consistent with the minimum commitment required of new recruits. It also demonstrates a real sense of purpose and a willingness to serve on the part of our veterans and still-serving members. At the same time, as others have noted, the five-year hiring preference for veterans would give them sufficient time, if needed, to further upgrade their education and skills before they seek a career in the federal public service.

Let me be very clear. While these measures greatly improve access for veterans and still-serving members to start rewarding new careers in the federal public service, this bill is not a blank cheque. Veterans and still-serving members of the Canadian Armed Forces

must still be fully qualified to perform the work for which they are applying. This is an essential point to note. We are committed to building the best, most talented, and most professional public service in the world, and we will never compromise on that.

However, as I noted at the outset, we are also well aware of the experience and expertise our veterans can bring to the workplace. We know that they have the skill sets to succeed at anything they set their minds to, and we want to maintain our own access to this pool of high quality individuals.

The Minister of Veterans Affairs often says that Canada's veterans reflect the very best of what it means to be Canadian. Who would not want to hire them into the positions and jobs they are trained and fully qualified to perform? That is why I am urging all members of the House, through you, Mr. Speaker, to support this important piece of legislation.

I do believe that we will have unanimous support, judging from the work we did on the committee. Here I would like to take this opportunity, once again, to thank my fellow committee members on the Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs. We do work incredibly well together. We do have the hearts of our veterans in mind. Many of us have a strong military background and are on the committee because we really want to serve our veterans well. This is one piece of legislation that I think would absolutely do that in conjunction with others.

Now, more than ever, let us show our support for every Canadian who has proudly worn our nation's uniform. They deserve every opportunity that we can provide for them. Bill C-27 is a truly worthy piece of legislation whose time has come. Let us make it happen. Please support it and all the fine men and women it is designed to help.

• (1520)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Sylvain Chicoine (Châteauguay—Saint-Constant, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his speech. I also want to acknowledge his work at the Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs.

As far as Bill C-27 is concerned, my conclusion is that it is a good bill, but it needs more work. In committee, we pointed to a few flaws. We also proposed some amendments that the government members did not want to accept.

One major oversight in this bill was that it left out RCMP officers. Many RCMP officers might have operational stress injuries and if those officers had been included in this bill, they might have benefited from it and applied for work in the public service. Unfortunately, the government failed to include them.

Other soldiers were left out, including those with operational stress injuries. Their injuries are related to their service, but they have to wait and turn to the Veterans Review and Appeal Board to reverse the department's decision, which initially did not recognize their service-related injuries.

Government Orders

Unfortunately, the government members did not want to amend the bill to include those people and I would like the hon. member to tell us why.

[*English*]

Mr. Bryan Hayes: Mr. Speaker, the member is correct that we discussed this in committee. Regarding the members of the RCMP specifically, they are members of the public service. Their employer is the Treasury Board and policies for them are devolved by the Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness.

We welcome that suggestion. However, we felt it was important to move forward because we do not control that particular policy. We can only control the policy that is applicable to the members this particular legislation is referring to. Maybe that is something the committee can consider at some point.

That being said, I believe that the RCMP is not included as a priority one hiring but within priority five hiring, so there is still a component of this legislation that does include the RCMP. It just does not move injured RCMP personnel right up to the number one priority.

Mr. Frank Valeriote (Guelph, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the member for Sault Ste. Marie, as well. On that committee, we are all earnest in our efforts on behalf of veterans but, of course, confined by the limits that a majority government puts upon us.

I would like to ask the member two questions, through you, Mr. Speaker. The first was raised at committee, so the member will not be surprised by it. Some of our veterans suffer from illnesses that do not manifest themselves until much later, especially when it comes to issues relating to mental illness. It can take them past the time limits within which they would otherwise qualify for this program. While they remain entitled to the statutory benefits that the law provides, they are not entitled to priority and hiring. I would like the member to address that.

In addition, I would like him to address the fact that since somewhere between 20,000 and 50,000 people are being let go and there is a hiring freeze, how realistic is it that veterans might actually get a job within the federal government?

• (1525)

Mr. Bryan Hayes: Mr. Speaker, regarding the late manifestations of injuries specifically, I believe that is why the bill is retroactive to 2012. For some of those manifestations that might come two years later, those folks would have an opportunity to start over with respect to their having five years of eligibility. I think that was our thought process with respect to that.

If we look at one of our recommendations on the new veterans charter moving forward, it was to look at what those potential new types of injuries are and how we might deal with them. I believe that was one of the recommendations, so it is partially addressed through that.

With respect to hiring, we did look at a chart that pointed out that about 7.8% of veterans who leave the armed forces will be looking for work. We heard from the Public Service Commission of Canada that there are 8,000 federal public service employees who are leaving and retiring each year. Since 2012, we heard that 2,500 of those employees have been rehired. I think we can assume that there is

going to be a rehiring process going on, based on the statistics that we heard. We can also make an assumption in moving forward with the veterans hiring act that priority injured veterans would move to the top of the line.

This is just a great benefit for our injured veterans.

Mr. Erin O'Toole (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of International Trade, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to personally thank the hon. member for Sault Ste. Marie. I had the honour of sitting on the Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs when I first joined Parliament in 2012. His passion and commitment to the Canadian Forces and our veterans, and his family's service in the Canadian Forces, have been clear to me from the first time I met him, as it has been to all members of the House.

He has raised some of the fundamental reasons why the veterans hiring act is before Parliament. There are groups of Canadians in Canada Company; True Patriot Love; and Treble Victor, a networking group of former men and women of the Canadian Forces and allied services, already doing veteran hiring, networking, and connecting. There are employers across the country hiring veterans not only because it is the right thing to do, but also because it is accretive to the bottom line of the company, because are hiring people with training, loyalty, and the inherent ability to stay on the job and complete tasks.

My question for the member stems from the comments of the member for Guelph, who seems to think that a lot of people might not be hired through this. I would like to ask the member how important it is that one of the largest employers in the country, the Government of Canada, puts as a top priority the hiring of veterans. The symbolism of that action, showing that we are putting veterans as a top priority for hiring and encouraging other employers to do that, is as important as the dozens or several hundred who might be hired as a result of this program. Could the member comment on that?

Mr. Bryan Hayes: Yes, I absolutely can comment, Mr. Speaker. It is incredibly important that we lead by example. A portion of this bill started in what I believe was Bill C-11. It was initiated a couple of years ago. This builds on that bill and makes it a better bill.

If the Government of Canada was not leading by example, it would be pretty two-faced to try to push it on corporate employers.

This bill is long overdue. I am very thankful that we are bringing it forward, and I hope we have the support of all members in the House.

Government Orders

• (1530)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Sylvain Chicoine (Châteauguay—Saint-Constant, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased today to be speaking to Bill C-27 at report stage, which gives veterans hiring priority in the public service.

First of all, I would like to remind Canadians that it has been a long road for this bill. Bill C-11 was introduced over a year ago. However, the government left out certain details and made some mistakes. As a result, the bill was abandoned and the government came back with Bill C-27, which is being studied today.

This new bill was introduced in response to certain criticisms of a less-than-stellar record concerning our veterans' employment and return to civilian life.

According to certain statistics, between 2006 and 2011, 2,000 veterans took advantage of the hiring priority and 1,024 of them obtained a job in the public service. Of these 1,024 veterans, 739 were hired by National Defence, which makes it the largest employer of veterans. The Department of National Defence tries really hard to hire veterans. Unfortunately, it is the only department that is making a significant effort to hire veterans, since the Department of Veterans Affairs provides the majority of the jobs, or 72%.

At Veterans Affairs, which should be quite open to hiring veterans, the situation is more disastrous. During this same service period, from 2006 to 2011, only 24 veterans managed to be hired by Veterans Affairs, which represents less than 2% of all jobs.

The second largest employer of veterans is Correctional Service Canada, which, in the same five-year period, hired 54 veterans, or 5% of all veterans hired. Not far behind is Human Resources and Skills Development, with 44 veterans hired, or 4% of all hires.

When we look at these figures, we see that few departments are making an effort to hire veterans. Most of the other departments did not hire even one veteran, while a few hired less than 10.

This means that a major change in culture is needed within the public service. I am not sure that this bill will be able to reverse the trend and ensure that many more veterans are hired, especially since so many cuts have been made to the public service in recent years. I think it will be many years before this bill has any effect on the hiring of veterans in the public service.

True to form, the government has introduced a bill that I feel is incomplete. This superficial bill is primarily designed to give the impression that the government is taking the necessary measures to help our veterans transition to civilian life. However, that is not the case. This bill is incomplete because it would have a limited impact, as I mentioned.

We will still support this bill, since in the long term—but not in the short or medium term—this bill will still help our veterans find good jobs and seamlessly transition into civilian life.

In this bill, the government did the bare minimum of what it could have done for our veterans who have been injured in service and are looking to get back into the job market. It can be extremely hard for veterans with disabilities to find suitable jobs.

Not only do veterans have to deal with physical limitations, but some may also face a number of prejudices related to operational stress. They must face many challenges to find a good job once they return to civilian life.

A survey of private-sector employees indicated that it would be essential to improve co-operation with the private sector, since they have very little knowledge of veterans' skills.

• (1535)

Human resources staff do not know how to read the resumé of military applicants. This same survey indicated that, of the 850 employers surveyed, the majority had little or no understanding of veterans' skills. Only 16% of companies make a special effort to hire veterans. Nearly half of employers believe that a university degree is far more important than the skills acquired by military personnel during their time in service, and only 13% of them stated that their human resources departments knew how to interpret the resumé of military applicants.

Given this situation, the government needs to accommodate these veterans and make it easier for them to join the public service. However, it is clear that this alone is simply not enough. The government decided that not all veterans would have access to priority hiring in the public service.

According to this bill, only military personnel who are medically released will have that priority in the public service. That is far too restrictive. It in no way takes into account our veterans who are not granted a medical release, but who, after launching an appeal with the department or the veterans board, are then recognized as having a service-related injury or disability.

Many veterans with physical and psychological symptoms would not be given immediate medical release. They have to appeal to the Veterans Review and Appeal Board to overturn those decisions and acknowledge the link between their injury and their military service. However, even once the board recognizes that, these people would unfortunately not receive hiring priority under this bill.

Unfortunately, the government chose not to include these people in this bill despite the fact that we proposed amendments to include them. The Conservative members of the committee simply decided to reject the amendment. To me, it was a no-brainer to grant hiring priority to that kind of veteran as well. The government just decided to turn its back on them.

Government Orders

Some injuries, such as post-traumatic stress disorder, do not show up until years later and can have a major impact on veterans' work. The Conservatives think that all the veterans have to do is sign up for a transition program and hope to find work that is a good fit with their condition, which is not always easy, especially in the private sector. As I mentioned, too few civilian employers truly recognize veterans' skills. The government's decision not to include them is shameful.

The public service would have been a very appropriate environment for these kinds of veterans. Working conditions and the duty to accommodate would have really helped these veterans maintain suitable, stable, long-term employment in an environment where they could properly adjust to their situation.

Furthermore, the Conservatives changed the definition of "veteran" in the Public Service Employment Act, so as to exclude the spouses of veterans from the preference list for jobs in the public service. This preference for the spouses of veterans, who would come before other Canadian citizens, was offered to the spouses of our Second World War and Korean War veterans.

Why did the government decide to exclude those spouses from the preference list? We might have thought that it was simply an oversight, but the government also refused our amendment that would have corrected the situation. Once again, the Conservatives decided to ignore these entirely reasonable requests.

The government says it wants to help families, but excluding spouses from the preference list is certainly no way to help families. On the one hand, the government accepted the recommendations of the Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs regarding families, but on the other hand, its actions go against those principles.

• (1540)

Once again, the government has abandoned veterans. In my opinion, the Conservative members of the committee were never interested in discussing the amendments with other committee members. I will even quote something the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Veterans Affairs said when the committee was examining the bill:

[*English*]

...right now obviously the intent is to get this bill through as quickly as possible. With regard to other suggestions and I think wonderful initiatives that you brought forward, we are happy to look at those, moving forward.

[*Translation*]

He will be happy to look into those suggestions, but he will do it later. He cannot be serious. Once this bill is passed, I doubt we are going to come back and amend it. What a joke. He just said that to get rid of us.

We also unanimously supported the report on the new charter, and we got the same type of response: later. The government said that it would examine the recommendations later, not now. That is nonsense. The Conservatives are not showing any real willingness to do anything that would actually help our veterans. The only amendment they made after the bill was examined in committee was to clarify who would be responsible for establishing the link between the injury and the military service. It is a good thing they did that

because the bill was rather vague in that regard when it was introduced. That was also one of the ombudsman's major concerns.

The Conservatives were also unable to conduct a decent examination of this bill because the shooting in Parliament took place on the first day this bill was scheduled to be examined in committee, and the meeting had to be cancelled. Unfortunately, instead of adding another meeting when we returned to work, the Conservatives decided to hold only one committee meeting to examine this bill. We were therefore unable to hear from anyone other than representatives of Veterans Affairs Canada and the Treasury Board. We were unable to meet with veterans groups that could have also presented some amendments and spoken to certain aspects of the bill. In my opinion, the bill was not thoroughly examined.

Some veterans groups had reservations about the bill. A member of the Canadian Association of Veterans in United Nations Peacekeeping said:

I am uncomfortable about the distinction made between service-related and non-service-related causes, and to the lack of recognition for RCMP members.

RCMP officers therefore have the right to be treated in the same way as members of our military. Unfortunately, the government did not want to include them in the bill.

What is more, the veterans ombudsman said the following on his blog:

...all medically releasing [sic] Canadian Armed Forces members should be treated the same way, because there is an inherent service relationship for every Canadian Armed Forces member who is medically released because the individual can no longer serve in uniform.

The Union of National Defence Employees had this to say:

Disabled veterans, especially those with stress-related injuries, who return to the workforce, must have access to reintegration services. Bill C-27 includes no such provision

To come back to the study in committee, unfortunately we were unable to have a meaningful study because the government did not schedule at least one meeting to hear from people who may have also been able to recommend certain changes. As I was saying, no changes, except for one minor one, were approved in committee.

This is a joke. Veterans' representatives should have appeared before the committee as witnesses, but the Conservatives wanted to pass this bill as quickly as possible. I think they have proven time and again that they have nothing but contempt for the legislative process and for Parliament.

As I said at the start, they did the bare minimum. The bill excludes soldiers who have non-service related injuries. It excludes veterans whose injuries are recognized later and it excludes veterans' spouses from the preference list.

• (1545)

The bill also leaves out RCMP officers. Half measures like these are no way to properly honour our veterans.

Mr. Speaker, we are going to support this bill, but we are a bit disappointed with its final draft. As they did with the committee report on the new charter, the Conservatives made promises they did not keep. They take far too long to make good on those promises.

Government Orders

[English]

Mr. Erin O'Toole (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of International Trade, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the member for his remarks today and for his service on the Veterans Affairs committee. I sat with him for some time and appreciated his work on the file.

He used debate on the veterans hiring act to, unfortunately, launch into a bit of a political attack, sadly, on a day when one of the findings in the Auditor General's report is that one part of Veterans Affairs that is working very well is rehabilitation and vocational assistance for injured members. There are 4,600 veterans within this program with mental health injuries, something that has been talked a lot about today.

The department has a goal of hitting 80% of cases being processed within a two-week standard to help veterans get rehabilitation and vocational retraining support for their transition to civilian life. It is actually exceeding that target. The Auditor General said that 84% are being assessed for vocational support and help with the transition to their new civilian lives within that two-week window.

I am sure that the member, as a member of the Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs, has read this section of the Auditor General's report. Does he not think that since we are doing a good job on the rehabilitation and vocational end that this hiring act would also provide an opportunity for people to find opportunities in the public sector?

[Translation]

Mr. Sylvain Chicoine: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague for his question. I will first answer the question he asked at the very end, and then I will come back to his other comments.

This definitely can help veterans but, as I mentioned, not in the short term or the medium term. With all the cuts made in the past few years, and those still to come, I find it hard to see how we can help veterans in the short term, since the public service has been gutted.

Of course there will be new hiring processes in the medium to long term. At that time, veterans will indeed be able to rely on the hiring priority to find a job in the public service. Furthermore, being aware of the hiring priority, they can find a new career and perhaps even learn new skills before the five-year deadline.

The parliamentary secretary spoke about the Auditor General's report. Unfortunately, we are looking at it through rose-coloured glasses, as it is a damning report for the government with respect to several issues concerning veterans. In particular, it mentions wait times that are far too long because about 1,000 positions have been cut at Veterans Affairs Canada in recent years. Consequently, the processing of veterans' cases takes much too long, and veterans do not receive the services to which they are entitled in a timely manner.

[English]

Mr. Frank Valeriote (Guelph, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I find it interesting that the member from the Conservative Party would stand and challenge the member from the NDP who just spoke and suggest that he was politicizing this debate by talking about how little may have been done and then would do the very same thing himself by highlighting one very tiny pebble of congratulations the Auditor General may have extended to the government, among a mountain of

criticism about the failure of the government to properly and in a timely way provide mental health services to the most needy veterans, those suffering from mental health conditions. Let us put this in perspective.

Having said that, I had the opportunity to be at Wainwright for four or five days and then on the HMCS *St. John's* for four or five days, and I can say that our service men and women, both at Wainwright in the military and in the navy on the HMCS *St. John's*, have incredible skills that could be translated into the private sector.

One of the things I asked the government to do was invest in a proper skills translator, instead of just offering people jobs that really do not exist, because of the hiring freeze, and find ways to identify people's skills and move them into the private sector. However, it did not want to do that. It is just another incident that suggests that this is all window dressing.

I am wondering if the hon. member can comment on that.

• (1550)

[Translation]

Mr. Sylvain Chicoine: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his question and for the work he does on the Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs. He is a huge asset to that committee. When this bill was being studied, he proposed several amendments that were rejected out of hand.

My colleague is correct. The government is all smoke and mirrors when it comes to veterans affairs. For months, it repeated that it had invested \$5 billion to help veterans since it came to power, even though that was untrue. It was \$4 billion, since \$1 billion was diverted and returned to the treasury. We could have used some of that money to hire staff to help veterans or military members who are struggling with service-related mental health problems.

The National Defence and Canadian Forces Ombudsman mentioned many times in previous reports that about 100 medical employees were needed to help people struggling with mental health problems. However, as we are seeing today, the government simply said that it would accept the recommendations in the report, but then it turned a blind eye to the issue. The government simply looks the other way and avoids the problems.

The government has shown in many ways that it has no regard for the mental health of veterans and it is not interested in helping them deal with this issue. The Auditor General's report today made it very clear that the way this government treats veterans is absolutely disgusting.

Mrs. Sadia Groguhé (Saint-Lambert, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague for the outstanding work he has done on this issue and as part of the committee.

Government Orders

In drafting this bill, the government did not consider putting the entitlement period on hold while the veteran is going through the appeal process.

What kinds of problems will that pose for our veterans?

Mr. Sylvain Chicoine: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the hon. member for her very relevant question. The entitlement period is one of the many issues with this bill.

Some military personnel who suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder are not immediately recognized as having a service-related injury. They are not granted the right release status when they return to civilian life. Sometimes, they have to launch an appeal with the veterans board so that their injuries are recognized as being directly related to their service.

When it takes veterans two or three years to obtain that decision from the board, in very rare cases, they can go back to see the national defence minister, who can amend the reason for release. If it takes three or four years for the reason for release to be changed, there is only one year, maybe two, left in the priority hiring period. That can cause problems. The veteran is at a disadvantage because his or her entitlement period is shorter than that of veterans whose injuries were immediately recognized upon release.

It is shameful that there was absolutely no desire to change that in committee. These people will have only one year or two to take advantage of their priority job placement in the public service, if they need it.

• (1555)

[*English*]

Mr. Frank Valeriote (Guelph, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, with the consent of the House, I would like to share my time with the member for Random—Burin—St. George's.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): Does the hon. member have consent?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Mr. Frank Valeriote: Mr. Speaker, one of the most substantial efforts we can make on behalf of our veterans is to help them find a career when they are released, medically or voluntarily, from the Canadian Forces. This bill might do this, though even if it does, I am afraid it likely will not be enough.

This bill amends the Public Service Employment Act to increase access to hiring opportunities in the public service for certain serving and former members of the Canadian Armed Forces. Furthermore, and perhaps more notably, this legislation would establish a right of appointment and priority over all other persons for certain members of the Canadian Forces who were released for medical reasons that were attributable to service. If members of the Canadian Armed Forces were released due to service-related injuries or illness, their priority in the public service hiring would move from fourth to first. Access to internal postings of the public service and priority over all others for external postings would be extended to Canadian Armed Forces members and veterans who had served at least three years and were honourably released.

It is one thing to have priority for jobs in the public service, but it would remain contingent on possessing the skills that match any

number of the public service jobs that exist. It would rely on there being positions available in the first place.

There is nothing in this bill that offers any form of skills translation or upgrading. Also, with the freeze on hiring, what jobs are Conservatives proposing these veterans fill? With 50,000 fewer jobs and a freeze on new hiring not many jobs are really available to recently or medically released veterans.

Officials from Veterans Affairs Canada noted that where issues arise, they involve certain groups of veterans: younger veterans, those with fewer years of service, those in the lower ranks, and those medically or involuntarily released.

The unemployment rate for veterans is more or less the same as the general Canadian unemployment rate, about 8%. That said, the unemployment rate for medically released veterans is much higher, at approximately 15%.

Beyond potential incapacity, there is the additional hurdle of seriously injured veterans who may be unlikely to find employment in line with their initial goals. Injury dashes a lot of those dreams. It is a long and often endless road from recovery to rehabilitation, and finally, to employment. This bill neither shortens this road nor hastens the completion of their efforts.

The government cannot look at a wounded soldier in the eye and point to this bill as an example of what a good job they are doing if, when that man or woman is ready to re-enter the workplace, that person is then told that there is no vacancy, that a hiring freeze is in place, and that the time in the Canadian Armed Forces really did not prepare him or her for a career in the public service.

Realistically, this bill is anathema to Conservatives. They do not believe that the government has any role in veterans' affairs, career transition, or rehabilitation. First and foremost, Conservatives have cut hundreds of millions of dollars from Veterans Affairs Canada, \$1 billion really, tying the hands of the department when it comes to delivering the benefits and supports veterans rely on.

Now add the egregious closure of nine regional Veterans Affairs offices, often in more remote places, like Brandon, Manitoba, and Sydney, Nova Scotia, and Cape Breton, making it more difficult for veterans to access these benefits and services in their communities. It is unconscionable that veterans, some of them seniors, might have to drive hours outside of their communities to receive face-to-face help.

Conservatives have claimed that veterans can still attend nearby Service Canada centres for services, but front-line staff at Service Canada are not trained to specifically help veterans, and caseworkers are currently burdened with a 40-to-1 caseload ratio.

Government Orders

The government would like Canadians to think they are doing a great job with veterans hiring. They spent millions of dollars advertising the career transition services in prime time playoff slots. I say millions, because among the only new spending in this year's Veterans Affairs estimates is \$4 million for advertising, a new and exclusive line item. I say millions, because despite my requests to the minister, his political staff, and his departmental officials, I cannot get an answer as to how much money they are spending on their advertising, precisely.

Had the minister accepted the committee's invitation to testify on this bill, I might have asked him how many veterans currently have access to priority hiring, how many more will have access with the changes made, and how many positions are in fact available to these veterans.

I might also have asked him about concerns expressed by the Veterans Ombudsman, Guy Parent, who, early on, questioned the adjudication of a releasing Canadian Armed Forces member's file to determine if the medical release was service-related.

• (1600)

This will be important in determining whether the member has a statutory or a regulatory priority, or, in effect, whether the priority will be for internal or external postings. This is unclear in the legislation, and I fear it has become a little more complicated since the amendments proposed by the government at committee. Initially the legislation held that the priority for appointment over all others was given to:

... a person who was released from the Canadian Forces for medical reasons that are attributable to service, who belongs to a class determined by the Commission and who meets the requirements established by the Commission.

Upon amendment, the section I quoted changes the priority to be given to:

a person who was released from the Canadian Forces for medical reasons that the Minister of Veterans Affairs determines are attributable to service

We know who adjudicates the files now, but I cannot believe that leaving it to the discretion to the minister was the sort of clarity the ombudsman was looking for. We must remember that this is a government that continually insists that it will not release soldiers before they are ready, but has repeatedly and abruptly ended the careers of injured soldiers who have asked to be kept on.

Finally, I would have asked the minister why his legislation would impose a five-year limit for priority hiring. For starters, the government is not hiring right now. Anyone who applies once this legislation goes into effect is racing against the clock for the government to lift its hiring freeze.

More importantly, the government is putting a five-year time limit on rehabilitation and then on finding a job, which does not take into account potential relapses of injuries at a later date or a later manifestation of an injury that may not be present immediately upon release. I am reliably informed that many still have an avenue to benefits, but no opportunity for employment. It is important that they be eligible to be employed, notwithstanding that they have access to the other regulatory benefits and at a time surpassing the five-year limit.

We are always responsible for those who were so willing to make sacrifices on our behalf, yet somehow the government feels that it has a limited responsibility for these brave men and women's unlimited liability.

The minister would have us believe that veterans, if healthy, will just move on to a career in security or policing, but that is not true. There are veterans like Sergeant Bjarne Nielsen, who wants to be a financial planner, or Corporal Mark Fuchko, who wants to be a lawyer. They do not need a government that dangles weak and ineffective legislation before them in place of real, effective action.

We all just returned from Remembrance Day ceremonies in our ridings a few weeks back. Thousands of celebrations were held across the country, celebrations made perhaps more meaningful by the sacrifice of two brave members of the Canadian Armed Forces here in Canada at a time when they never would have expected to face threats or danger. We have all just returned from looking into the faces of generations of Canadians who served this country with honour, dignity, and professionalism.

To our veterans we owe a sacred obligation. When they and their families agreed to make sacrifices for the well-being of Canada and Canadians, we committed to their well-being and the well-being of their families, and in that commitment lies the necessity to take care of them no matter what.

I truly hope that this legislation will create positions for veterans. Even if it helps one veteran, we should and must support it. The Liberal Party will support it. However, members should not be mistaken: this is a weak, inefficient, and disappointing bill put forward by a minister and a government that have confirmed time after time that they would rather look good than do anything meaningful to help our servicemen and women and their families.

Mr. Erin O'Toole (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of International Trade, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the member said he is going to support the bill, but then spoke on a range of other issues.

He spoke again about the closure of the veterans service offices, which were administrative points of contact but provided no benefits or actual programs to veterans.

In my area of Ontario, the Durham region, there are about 500,000 people, and we have never had one of those veterans affairs offices. The majority of the work done for our veterans has been done by the Legion's veterans service officers, who report in through their district officer right to Veterans Affairs Canada.

I would like to ask that member how veterans in the wider Guelph area have been served over the last several decades. Have they had a veterans affairs office in their community, or have they, for 50 years or so, used veterans service officers from the Legion?

Government Orders

•(1605)

Mr. Frank Valeriote: Mr. Speaker, I have to speak on behalf of all Canadians and not just those who are in Guelph.

Yes, the member is quite right that veterans have used the services of Legion members in Guelph, but I have also been to Brandon and talked to veterans there who are completely discouraged by the closure of the veterans office in Brandon. They now have to drive for hours to Winnipeg. We are talking about older veterans. We are talking about veterans who need immediate access to the workers who had expert knowledge of what services were available when they were with Veterans Affairs Canada in those veterans offices.

Now a lot of them have to go to Service Canada and see people who are, frankly, not qualified to answer the questions that veterans ask. This is the experience not just of people in Brandon, but of people on Cape Breton Island and around seven other veterans offices across this country that have been closed.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Anne-Marie Day (Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I did hear the member and I did read the bill.

I would like to ask him a question about the five-year period that veterans are given to find a job. Veterans who want to get training and go to university need four years if they begin their studies the moment they put their names on the list for a job. However, if a program requires a master's degree—the federal public service wants skilled workers with suitable training—is that five-year period not too short?

[*English*]

Mr. Frank Valeriote: Mr. Speaker, I thank the member from the official opposition for that question. That is exactly the point that was raised by the NDP and the Liberals at committee: the window is not broad enough to capture those people who may wish to retrain. Interestingly, no part of the bill actually provides for the retraining to qualify for a job that may be available. The question was asked and debated, but it was refused by the government.

As well, that is not to mention those people whose service injuries may manifest themselves at a time after one might otherwise qualify to find a job within the scope of this legislation. We asked for an amendment to remove the restriction of five years, but because the current government is all hat and no cattle, it was “No, sorry.”

Not one amendment was accepted. It happens all the time, and time after time. Every single time a good idea is presented, even when we are supporting the bill, it is rejected by the Conservative government.

Ms. Judy Foote (Random—Burin—St. George's, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise in support of a measure that would provide support for the brave men and women of the Canadian Armed Forces and Canadian veterans, to whom we owe so much. My concern is that while Bill C-27 may provide support for a small number of service members and veterans, it would not do nearly enough.

Bill C-27 is designed to amend the Public Service Employment Act to provide increased access to hiring opportunities in the public service for certain current and former members of the Canadian

Armed Forces. In Random—Burin—St. George's, over 700 men and women are serving in all branches of the military, and it is those young men and women and the repercussions of the experiences they have that I think about whenever we talk about veterans or going to war.

The proposed legislation in Bill C-27 would ensure priority is given to Canadian Armed Forces members who are released because of service-related illness or injury, and would extend eligibility to reservists and Canadian Rangers.

Bill C-27 would also provide increased access to internal public service postings for eligible members and veterans and increase their period of eligibility. This all sounds very good. We can all agree these changes are indeed positive steps.

However, what they are not is a substitute for a real plan to ease the transition of service members and veterans into civilian employment. The government can and must do more to assist veterans in finding work following their military service. Unfortunately, nothing in Bill C-27 actually ensures that veterans will get jobs.

We know that helping veterans find jobs is a crucial step in their return to civilian life and well-being upon release from the military. Under normal circumstances, placing injured veterans at the head of the civil service hiring line and increasing access for veterans of the Canadian Armed Forces would be considered a valuable commitment and something to be applauded. In this instance, however, the promise is being made by a government that has already cut 20,000 public service jobs and is on track to cut 30,000 more.

Regrettably, Bill C-27 appears poised to have little impact on the day-to-day lives of the majority of Canadian veterans. In the words of Jerry Kovacs, a director with Canadian Veterans Advocacy, “In theory, it's a good bill. ... Initiatives to hire veterans are good initiatives. [But] if there are no jobs, how can there be any priority hiring? So it's kind of a hollow promise.”

After years of cuts and hiring freezes, there are fewer civil service jobs for veterans to fill than ever before. Bill C-27 would do nothing for veterans who may be too ill or too injured to work.

In his recent report, Guy Parent, the Veterans Ombudsman, stated that “Severely impaired Veterans can face a lifetime of loss of employment and career progression opportunities.” Simply put, even injured veterans who are already entitled to government assistance are not receiving it. The Veterans Ombudsman's report indicated that nearly half of the country's most severely disabled ex-soldiers are not receiving a government allowance intended to compensate them for their physical and mental wounds. The ombudsman also concluded that many of those who are receiving the permanent impairment allowance are only being awarded the lowest grade of the benefit, which is the minimum amount.

Government Orders

The federal government also has an obligation to assist injured and ill veterans to find jobs when they are released from the Canadian Armed Forces, but Bill C-27 should not replace the government's responsibility to help injured CAF members stay in the forces when that is their wish.

Furthermore, there is a genuine concern that soldiers may hide health problems so that they will not lose their income. The Conservative government must do everything it can to ensure Canadian Armed Forces personnel suffering from physical and mental injuries need not fear being set adrift and having to keep their wounds secret in order to qualify for their pensions.

Recently released government statistics show that approximately 1,100 of the 6,200 soldiers discharged because of health conditions since 2009 were unable to serve the 10-year minimum required to collect a full pension.

• (1610)

Under the existing policy, many Canadian Armed Forces personnel face the dilemma of having to choose between risking their physical and mental health or risking their financial future. Soldiers suffering from PTSD and other ailments can either avoid seeking help in the hope of making it to pension eligibility, or seek necessary care and risk losing their pensions. Bill C-27 is clearly just the latest example of the Conservative government attempting to hide its inaction on the many issues affecting CAF members and veterans today. The Conservatives boast how much they support our soldiers and care about veterans and their families, but the facts show otherwise. Shamefully, the Conservative government continues to abdicate its responsibility to care for Canadian veterans.

A few months ago the Minister of Veterans Affairs called into question the social and legal responsibility Canada has for its soldiers. On at least two separate occasions since then, the Minister of Veterans Affairs has literally turned his back on veterans and their families who have come to Ottawa to voice their concerns about the lack of respect and support they have been receiving from the Conservative government. When it closed nine regional Veterans Affairs offices throughout the country, including one in Corner Brook, Newfoundland and Labrador, and committed to eliminating 781 jobs from the Department of Veterans Affairs by 2014-15, it claimed it was doing so in an attempt to cut costs. Meanwhile the Conservative government continues to spend millions of taxpayer dollars on partisan advertising while neglecting Canada's veterans. Then, at the last minute, when it knows the Auditor General's report is coming out, it comes out with a pot of goodies that we know are promises and only promises.

In his report today, the Auditor General concluded that Veterans Affairs is largely unconcerned with how well veterans are being served and whether programs are making a difference in their lives. While \$1.13 billion in funding for veterans having gone unspent since the Conservative government took power, veterans have been forced to wait months for the mental health services they so desperately need. According to the Auditor General's report, about 15,000 veterans and serving military personnel were eligible to receive health support from Veterans Affairs through the disability benefits program at the end of last March. The number is expected to

increase as more veterans of the Afghanistan campaign leave the military for civilian life in the coming years.

Over the past decade, 160 Canadian Armed Forces members have died by suicide, and 158 died serving in Afghanistan. Many more continue to struggle with mental health issues, such as post-traumatic stress disorder. The Auditor General's report confirms what Liberals have long maintained, that the Conservative government simply is not doing enough to help our veterans and their families who have sacrificed so much for their country. They have put their lives on the line and some have made the ultimate sacrifice, yet we are not there for them in the way they need us to be.

As Canadians we owe a debt of gratitude to our soldiers, sailors, airmen, and their families. They require assistance in so many ways. Unfortunately, because the Conservatives are refusing to respond to the needs of our veterans, the latter are being forced to mobilize in a variety of ways to get their message out about how unfairly they are being treated. Bill C-27 does very little to address a much larger problem. This bill is a step in the right direction, as my colleague has said, but there is much that still needs to be done. It is time for the government to start treating our veterans and their families with the respect they have earned and deserve from those of us who get to live a much better life, and those throughout the world who get to live under better circumstances because of their efforts. This begins by listening to the concerns being raised by those who have already sacrificed so much, instead of ignoring them when they reach out for help, which unfortunately the Conservative government continues to do.

• (1615)

Mr. Erin O'Toole (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of International Trade, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for Random—Burin—St. George's for her remarks. One of the highlights of my time sailing aboard HMCS *St. John's* was travelling with Lieutenant Governor House and his wife on an outpost visit through the member's riding, including small communities like Francois and some really charming parts of Canada. There are some wonderful people in her riding.

I will ask her the same question I asked her colleague from Guelph. Do veterans, whether traditional war veterans or newer veterans, who after active service return to Stephenville or Marys-town or some of the smaller communities in her riding, use a bricks and mortar Veterans Affairs office or do they receive support mainly from veteran service officers at Legions in many of those towns?

Ms. Judy Foote: Mr. Speaker, if colleague has been in Francois, McCallum, and La Poile, he has indeed been in my riding, which is one of the most beautiful parts of the country. It is also a riding where we have many men and women involved in the military, who do so much to represent Canada in fighting wars abroad.

Government Orders

The veterans in Random—Burin—St. George's avail themselves of whatever services are available to them, whether in a building, through other services, or whether they try to use the Internet. A lot of them of course do not use the Internet, and when they return to rural communities it is much easier if there is a short drive. A short drive, for instance, is to go from a small community like Stephenville, or Stephenville Crossing, to Corner Brook. The Conservatives have now closed that office in Corner Brook, so for any of those veterans, it is now at least a three-and-a-half hour drive to St. John's to be able to have the same service they could have received before the government closed the office in Corner Brook.

• (1620)

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Sadia Groguhé (Saint-Lambert, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for her speech.

As she pointed out—as we all pointed out—we cannot do enough for our veterans to honour their service to the nation.

There is a major problem with how this bill treats veterans with post-traumatic stress disorder.

Specifically, there is a problem with the administrative delay in responding to veterans who have experienced such trauma, and this bill does very little about it.

What does my colleague think of that?

[*English*]

Ms. Judy Foote: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for her question and her recognition of how serious this issue is with respect to those who served in the military and returned suffering from PTSD.

There should not be a window. The service should be available to a veteran whenever it is determined that they need the services. As my colleague has said, in a lot of cases it may not even present itself very soon after the veteran returns home. Therefore, to put a timeframe in place in which they have to work is really unfair, which again points to the lack of support for our veterans. Our veterans need to be able to avail themselves of whatever services are available to them, as our way of thanking them for the sacrifices they have made on behalf of Canadians.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I know that the member is a very strong advocate for her community on a wide variety of issues. She is obviously very passionate about our veterans.

She makes reference to the offices that have been closed. At the same time, we find out the government has held back spending money for veterans to the tune of hundreds of millions of dollars. Could the member provide comment?

Ms. Judy Foote: Mr. Speaker, I thank the my colleague for his question because we find it almost unbelievable that this could happen to our veterans. These veterans have given so much and could use so much more support in recognition of the sacrifices they have made, yet the government has turned around and not used funding that had been there specifically to help our veterans. Instead, they let it go back to the treasury to be used for other purposes,

including partisan advertising, which should never, ever be done on the backs of those who are most vulnerable, including our veterans.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): It is my duty pursuant to Standing Order 38 to inform the House that the questions to be raised tonight at the time of adjournment are as follows: the hon. member for York South—Weston regarding housing and the hon. member for Saanich—Gulf Islands regarding the environment.

Resuming debate, the hon. Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of International Trade.

Mr. Erin O'Toole (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of International Trade, CPC): Mr. Speaker, to be honest with the House, I was not at first going to rise to debate Bill C-11 because I spoke at second reading on this bill. However, I stayed after question period to hear how much discussion of veterans hiring and the veterans hiring act there would be. Because so many members of the House chose to say quietly that they were going to support the bill, but then used it to talk about a range of other issues, I decided to speak yet again.

It is always an honour for me to speak in the House on issues related to the Canadian Forces and our veterans, and particularly to try to raise the level of debate, to try to bring some statistics and facts to bear on it, as well as to highlight some of the amazing work being done by non-governmental actors in both the rehabilitation and particularly the retraining and employment of our veterans. I did that at second reading, highlighting some exceptional Canadian leaders in that regard. I will do a bit more of that today.

Going back to Bill C-11, as I said in my previous speech in the House, this has an important impact on a small number of veterans, but perhaps more importantly, it is massively symbolic, as the Canadian government is one of the largest employers, if not the largest employer, in the country. Bill C-11 states that after three years of honourable service in the Canadian Forces, people who transition out of the forces and become veterans will have priority one hiring in the rest of the civil service for a five-year period. We have heard some members of this House state that they still have to qualify for the position; of course they do. Veterans who leave the Canadian Forces, when they hang up their uniform, have an amazing range of skills and experience.

In fact, last night after I appeared on a panel and tried desperately for the second time to explain how the estimates process in the House works to my friend from Guelph, a retired Canadian Forces captain from Chester, Nova Scotia, emailed me to say he shared my frustration with the lack of uptake with my friends. He told his story to me of how he served for several years in the Canadian Forces and then transitioned to 20-plus years as a foreign service officer for Canada. Certainly, it has been the experience, from the Great War right through to today, that we have seen a lot of citizen soldiers, and soldiers who become corporate leaders and productive business owners and entrepreneurs. It is up to the veterans to qualify for positions, but they will get priority one hiring, meaning that if there are several eligible candidates, veterans with service-related injuries would get the priority hiring.

Government Orders

It is important to see who could be impacted by this because it is not a couple of people, as some of my colleagues in this debate have suggested. There are about 4,000 men and women who release from the Canadian Forces each year. The majority of those are regular retirements or completions of service contracts. When I left after 12 years, I would have been among the several thousand people that year to transition out. However, there are over 1,200 members of all ranks who leave because of medical release. That could be everything from those who have had an injury right through to those whose medical category might have changed, like a pilot's vision declining before getting his or her wings. Twelve hundred is a big number, and the vast majority of those would have post-secondary education, because now both non-commissioned members of the Canadian Forces and officers tend to have at least a college or a bachelor's degree. In some of the specialized trades within the Canadian Forces, the members have some of the most cutting-edge training in technology, intelligence-gathering, communications, and signals. These are in-demand services also used by other departments within the government. Many of them would also be bilingual, having either joined the Canadian Forces with a bilingual background or received training over the course of their time in uniform, therefore making them even stronger candidates for some of the work with the federal government.

• (1625)

The bill puts a five-year timeframe on it because that is an appropriate timeframe for the priority hiring. That five-year period would allow that veteran to accept the training or vocational support as part of their retirement or departure from the Canadian Forces. They would be able to educate, potentially move back to their place of enrolment or place in Canada, and that period gives them that chance.

I am proud that our government has dramatically increased what a veteran can get in terms of retraining and education assistance. There are higher numbers of education assistance while they are in uniform in the Canadian Forces and there is more outside. In fact, the total envelope that an individual veteran could get, depending on their background, their time in and what courses they take, is in the tens of thousands of dollars of that retraining and re-education assistance. This would be accomplished within those first five years and that would be the period of time that priority hiring would be held for that veteran.

Now I will talk a bit about some of the other items people have addressed in the debate today to show that overall our government is making tremendous strides, particularly on the transition of men and women from uniform in the Canadian Forces to civilian life as a veteran.

In fact, one of the things the Auditor General's report from today highlights is that our government has invested heavily with Veterans Affairs and is working and meeting its objectives in rehabilitation and vocational assistance.

One of my friends in the House suggested that was focusing on a small in the Auditor General's audit on veterans mental health. No, that was one of the two major categories at which the auditor looked. He looked at 4,600 veterans with a mental health condition of some sort. The department's goal was to ensure that veterans could qualify

for this rehabilitation and vocational assistance. The goal was 80% to qualify and be on the program within two weeks within the department. The Auditor General showed that 84% were getting on to that program within the two week goal.

In the case of rehabilitation and vocational assistance, this is directly germane to this debate because it is about transitioning and allowing veterans to get the education or training to become a priority hire of the federal government, or a great hire for the private sector. The Auditor General is saying that we are getting that pretty much right. As a veteran, I would love to see 100% within two weeks. We should always strive to do a little better, but in the House, we should also strive to actually look at a report that comes out like this.

It is important, because we asked the Auditor General to look at mental health. We wanted to see where we were doing well and where we had to improve, because we are investing heavily. The Auditor General suggested \$500 million each year earmarked specifically for mental health support.

On the weekend, there was a new announcement about even more money, but it is also about performance and whether that money is making the intended impact. That is why our government asked the Auditor General to look at this area. That is important context.

Another thing about the Auditor General's report that I take as a good indication is some of the statistics. The big one shows that we are finally addressing the issue of stigma, which haunts mental health, not just in the veterans community, but the mental health discussion across the country. Stigma affects the ability of somebody to come forward and ask for help.

I have spoken in the House before about the MP from my riding 100 years ago, Sam Sharpe, who served at Vimy as a sitting MP and took his own life on return from World War I at the Royal Victoria Hospital from shell shock. We have not been dealing well throughout our history with post traumatic stress, with mental illness as a result of service. We still have a way to go, but we are getting better.

• (1630)

What did the Auditor General say?

Ten years ago, there were only about 2% who would identify as a medically-released veteran with a mental health injury. Now, it is 12%. There has been a 10% increase. Some of that would be attributable to the fact that we were engaged in a combat mission in Afghanistan, certainly, but I think all members, and certainly any advocates in the mental health community, would also say that the reason we are seeing that higher number over such a short period of time is we are finally getting to the stigma issue and more Canadians are willing to come forward to seek treatment, some of which is innovative and can really help them get back to leading a fully productive life as not just a soldier but as a father or a mother. Getting rid of that stigma allows them to get the support quicker.

Government Orders

I read in the news the other day about a veteran who was concerned that he went undiagnosed from his tour in Bosnia years ago. That is likely because the Canadian Forces, and really society 20 years ago, was not doing well in this area. The first operational stress injury clinic for the Canadian Forces was not opened until 2002. There were two, perhaps a third almost opened under the previous government. We have opened an additional 12 to 14 in that time. On the weekend, we that a new one would open in Halifax and satellite offices in another seven communities, bringing the total up to 25, to spread that operational stress injury clinic network across the country. Therefore, when men and women leave the Canadian Forces, they have support regardless of where they live.

The Auditor General has shown that more Canadians are coming forward to get the help they need. That training and educational assistance, which I said numbers in tens of thousands of dollars, can help them retrain and be ready for an opportunity in the federal public service as a priority one hire under the veterans hiring act, Bill C-11, or within the private sector.

I would like to showcase some of the leadership going on across the country when it comes to hiring our veterans.

Non-profit charitable groups like Canada Company has a hiring program with employers, engaging them, reaching out to veterans and trying to plug them into opportunities. Someone I served in the military with, Walter Moniz, works diligently on that program for Canada Company, and I would like to thank Blake Goldring for starting Canada Company and this program on hiring and transition for our veterans.

True Patriot Love, a charity that I had been involved in forming prior to my time in Parliament, hosted a conference called "From Battlefield to Boardroom", It was focused at human resources leaders within companies so they could learn about the value of hiring a veteran and learn what the difference between a corporal and a colonel was. This is self-evident when one is in uniform, but it is not as evident to civilian employers or an HR department if they have no familiarity with military service and the experience that those Canadians would have. At that "From Battlefield to Boardroom" conference were veterans who secured jobs when employers realized what a tremendous opportunity they were for their company.

Finally, I have also spoken in the House on a few occasions about a really exceptional group called Treble Victor. That is a group of former military members, not just from the Canadian Forces but also from our allied forces. There are some British, French, and South African veterans who are volunteers. They served some time in uniform and now want to help men and women leave and transition into meaningful post-CF employment. These people have busy careers and lives but volunteer their time to meet with employers and to mentor the men and women of the Canadian Forces transitioning

I have had the good fortune of working with Treble Victor for many years and want to applaud it on its efforts, again. Tim Patriquin is the current head of Treble Victor, and I want to thank them for their work.

I should also add that one of the carpenters' unions and its members have also done a tremendous job in reaching out directly. I

have met some of their leadership who are reaching out and giving opportunities within the skilled trades.

• (1635)

With all of these groups, such as non-governmental operators, charities and people volunteering their time, is it not important that the government shows that it is also putting the hiring of veterans as a priority? I think I said at second reading that whether Bill C-11 hires 10 people or 100 people, the symbolism of it is as important as the men and women who may benefit from it. It shows that the federal government, as one of the largest employers in the country with coast to coast reach, puts a priority on hiring our veterans, particularly those who exit as a result of an injury or a medical category change of some sort. The federal government has the obligation to show leadership on this front, and Bill C-11 is the embodiment of this.

I would like to return to a subject that I have spoken about several times in the House and that, sadly, has become so politicized we cannot even have an honest debate about it, which is the nine regional Veterans Affairs bricks and mortar offices that were closed. I asked the members for Guelph and Random—Burin—St. George's if veterans in their ridings used a bricks and mortar office. I would invite Canadians to check *Hansard*. They will see the members did not answer that question.

In fact, while I was on a political panel with the defence critic from the Liberal Party, I suggested the Legion played an important role in helping veterans access their benefits and services. I was mocked for that position. I think she said something like I was outsourcing to the Legion. The Legion, which was created in 1925 and in 1926 became incorporated by a special act of Parliament in the House, was empowered from its start to help support our veterans.

There is actually no better network of people helping our veterans than Legion veterans service officers. They have done it for generations. That is the real answer to the question that my friend from Random—Burin—St. George's did not want answer. In small communities like Stephenville and Marystown in her riding, there was never a bricks and mortar office. Were the veterans not helped or ignored for 50 years? No. In the vast majority of cases, they were helped by their veterans service officers, who have a direct link into Veterans Affairs Canada.

Government Orders

In the Auditor General's report today, the Auditor General asked some of the veterans service officers their thoughts on some of the cumbersome administrative forms used in their help with veterans. The Auditor General asked the Legion about how we could maybe make some of these administrative forms and the delays from them shorter. Our Conservative government already moved on that to reduce the application from seven pages to three, or something like that. The Auditor General went back to veterans service officers from the Legion to once again ask if the changes had been beneficial. It is in his report.

This is the issue that we do not talk about in a rational way. Our government has the obligation to provide support and access to that support for veterans who are in their late 20s from Afghanistan to veterans in their 90s, some of whom are in Italy right now, visiting Ortona and the places that they helped to liberate. We have to do that, not by staying put with the way things were done in the 1950s. As a veteran, it is important for us to do what we are doing, opening 18 to 25 operational stress injury clinics across the country that actually deliver services. We are not doing things in a way that involves only eight or nine people walking into an office to fill in forms.

I hope the veterans hiring act is not just an opportunity to revisit why it is so important for the federal government to lead in this category and this issue. I hope it is a good opportunity for all members of the House to try to bring a much more informed and dedicated debate to the House when it comes to veterans.

• (1640)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Raymond Côté (Beauport—Limoilou, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. parliamentary secretary for his speech.

Since he raised the issue of honesty, I would ask him to be honest in the context of the debate we are having right now.

Unfortunately, following the events of October 22, the Conservatives refused to change the schedule of the Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs, which has prevented the committee from hearing from some individuals directly involved, specifically, some veterans' groups and representatives of the public service union.

I wonder if the parliamentary secretary can tell me why the Conservatives have been so inflexible and why—there is no denying it—they refused to have a truly open debate on an issue as important as this.

• (1645)

[*English*]

Mr. Erin O'Toole: Mr. Speaker, when I was on the veterans affairs committee, we heard regularly from witnesses. There were extensive consultations done in the review by the committee on the new veterans charter, and I applaud their unanimous decisions.

Many of the groups involved in transition, involved in the issues related to Bill C-11, actually appeared before that committee. Many of the NATO veterans, and the Legion veterans transition program, appeared, and that input was taken.

I am glad that the member mentioned the Public Service Alliance of Canada union. In fact, the only negative comments about Bill

C-11 that I have been able to find were from the public sector union. What is unfortunate is that it was also the one to craft the debate on the regional offices.

At its first press conference, in October of last year, I attended that meeting. Mr. Clarke, from Sydney, said that he wanted to make sure that someone in his Service Canada office had experience with veterans. We listened, and by Christmas we had transferred a veterans case officer from the office that was closing, to the Service Canada office down the street. We had directly listened to his input.

Sadly, that has been lost in the discussion because it is being pushed forward by the invisible hand.

Hon. Mark Eyking (Sydney—Victoria, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have to sympathize with the member for trying to defend the government on the disastrous veterans affairs file.

I had to get up when he started talking about Sydney and Cape Breton, and Mr. Clarke, to put it in context. He started talking about how the legions are going to help service the veterans, and how they can go to a building and that they do not need a building.

The member should have been at the rally where there were over 2,000 or 3,000 people in support of veterans, what they are going through, the service they are not getting, and how the pressure is being put on the legions.

We have about 30 legions in Cape Breton, and maybe one of them is looking to step up to do that which they cannot do. Could the member try to explain how all of these legions are going to service the veterans?

The caseworkers are so used to working with the Legion members and the veterans, and now veterans will have to travel to Halifax, over 300 miles, to get any service. How can the member defend the position of closing the office in Sydney that services so many veterans? Cape Breton has been one of the biggest contributors to any war movement in the last 100 years.

Mr. Erin O'Toole: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the member for raising that issue.

In fact, I have enjoyed my discussions with Mr. Clarke on this very issue. After we listened to his input and the minister made the change, I called Mr. Clarke at home to tell him that we would be transferring a caseworker, maybe even the one he was used to dealing with, to the Service Canada office.

Those stand-alone VAC offices did not deliver care to our veterans; I have heard some members refer to them as hospitals. They provided administrative support.

Government Orders

Now, if veterans go into the Service Canada offices, and I invite that member to do this, there is a separate kiosk in Sydney manned by an experienced Veterans Affairs caseworker. In that Sydney office, there were only about 8 to 10 people in per day, so one person to help with the administration is sufficient.

The member has highlighted the Legions, and I would bet that for decades most veterans on Cape Breton Island, in greater Sydney, have been using their veterans service officers at the legion. If there are issues that they are having, we should work on those. The Auditor General is referring to their work.

I would like the member to get out and meet with those Legions, and let us see how we can make sure that they continue to do the leadership job that they have been doing.

• (1650)

Mr. Brian Masse (Windsor West, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the parliamentary secretary has been referring to the bill as Bill C-11, but it is actually Bill C-27.

However, I would like to ask member, when he was parliamentary secretary and the government closed the Windsor office, how many clients had to go to London for their service? How many clients specifically from Windsor lost service?

Mr. Erin O'Toole: Mr. Speaker, I had a great visit to Windsor, where I met with a number of veterans on this specific issue, including a veteran the member knows well, Bruce Moncur, whom I consider a friend and who is an advocate on these issues.

However, to answer the member's question directly, there were fewer than 150 case-managed veterans in that wider area.

There are only 7,500 veterans across Canada who have a case manager. A case manager is assigned based on the complexity of a case on a variety of subjects, including mental health or medical issues. Therefore, within the catchment, there would be fewer than 150 case-managed veterans, which is why on most days there would be less than 10 people in that physical office. If there are only 150 people who might be using the office on a regular basis, how many are going to go in on the same day?

In Windsor, as the member knows, one of the experienced caseworkers from the Veterans Affairs office is now in the Service Canada office. I cannot remember if the Service Canada office is in the same building in Windsor, but I think it is nearby, and it can handle any of the folks who come in. They have the experience in that office, and they can give the same level of administrative support.

Change is hard, but a lot of the younger veterans tend not to go into the bricks and mortar offices anyway. Therefore, we have been doing the My VAC online account, where a number of Afghanistan veterans have registered to have their cases managed online. It is not about doing it just the way it was done in the 1950s; it is about serving veterans from the ages of 20 to 90.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, regarding the bill itself, we recognize some of the best examples, such as Commissionaires Manitoba, and those who hire individuals who have retired from the forces. There is a great asset there, and members of our forces bring that to the table. That is really what the bill is about in terms of the government. However, it is interesting

that the government is laying off tens of thousands of civil servants while promoting this particular bill.

I will push that to the side because the member wants to focus on the massive cuts, which is what it is. He stands up and can put all the colour that he wants to it, but the bottom line is that the government has cut services to veterans through offices all across the country, and at the same time hundreds of millions dollars were lapsed and not spent.

My question to the member is very specific. He cannot tell this House that people were not using that office, because that would be wrong. People were using the office. Why does he believe that the Prime Minister chose to make those cuts to services for veterans at the same time that it was not spending hundreds of millions of dollars?

Mr. Erin O'Toole: Mr. Speaker, there is so much in there that I am not sure where to start. However, I would like to show the member that veterans have been hired in the last few years.

I had the honour of speaking on a panel for military families support, with Dominique Kowlessar, who was wounded in his service in Afghanistan and now works in the federal government. He is a tremendous leader.

There are real opportunities right now. What we would do with Bill C-27—and I thank my opposition friend for correcting me, as I had spoken on Bill C-11—is to make sure that it is a top priority, so we could get more Dominiques.

I appreciate my friend's work. We have hosted events for veterans on the Hill together. He served in the forces, and I appreciate it. However, he knows very well that when it comes to lapses, they only exist because we did not hit our estimate.

For example, if a Canadian household estimates that it is going to spend \$2,000 on Manitoba Hydro in a year and it comes in under that, it does not ask Manitoba Hydro for the difference. No. That household had not paid for it; it was an estimate. The member knows that.

There was a \$100 million lapsed in the last year of the Martin government.

The lapse is mainly due to the fact that not enough veterans are accessing the services, and some of our World War II and Korean War veterans are passing away.

Mr. Brian Masse (Windsor West, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is an honour to split my time with the member for Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca.

I am pleased to rise on a subject that hits close to me.

Government Orders

Bill C-27 is a missed opportunity. Bill C-11 was significantly flawed, and Bill C-27 is flawed as well. There may be some improvements for veterans services at some point, but they will be almost accidental.

I take issue with the parliamentary secretary when he says that to show leadership, we just have to pass the bill. I think he said "symbolism". No, we need legislation that works for our veterans. We need legislation that would actually get them employed. We need legislation that would change their lives. We need legislation that would let them and their families reach their full potential. We do not need legislation that is just symbolic, like words on a piece of paper, and then put on a shelf somewhere in a book of legislation. It has to translate to something real.

I grew up with some of this. My grandfather was John Clifford Addison. He died on HMS *Scorpion* during the fall of Burma. My grandmother in London married Fred Attwood, who became my grandfather. He came over to Canada, and he was lucky he came to Canada. I say he was lucky because he had transferable skills. He had been an electrician on a number of different naval ships, including HMS *Ark Royal*. He got a job at Hiram Walker. Being an electrician gave him a great skill set, and the company needed people.

Before I came to this place, I used to work on behalf of persons with disabilities at the Association for Persons with Physical Disabilities of Windsor and Essex County. I dealt with people with different types of disabilities, such as cerebral palsy, spina bifida, brain injury, and a number of different things.

The investment in that program was made during the Mike Harris years. We had to prove, and we did prove, that the government saved money by making a mild investment into the association to have that program running. It was just myself working for the association, and later on we grew to two. We protected the program by showing the type of services offered, whether it was resumé writing, life skills, or on-the-job training. I would go on site and work with an individual, and this gradually paid off over time. I am raising this point because that type of support system was necessary for those individuals to maintain their employment. It also led to better workplaces. Later on I did the same type of work with Youth At Risk. The investment was significant.

Bill C-27 contains some provisions, such as the five-year sunset clause, that could cause structural problems if people need to be retrained. Some people cannot get trained in five years because they need post-secondary education or because the job requires additional education on top of that. If someone is suffering from some sort of problem, he or she might not be capable of taking a full course load 100% of the time, so that individual might divide it up, whether it is college or university or some type of training. I do not like this element of the legislation.

It is important to note that the veterans affairs office was closed in Windsor. I take issue with that, because we have in my riding the Essex and Kent Scottish Regiment and HMCS *Hunter*, two armed forces units that have been strong for this country.

We were recruited heavily for Afghanistan. I remember the billboards. Members of the recruitment office attended festivals,

fairs, and a number of different places where that would not normally be seen because Windsor had high unemployment. Windsor has contributed quite a bit, and to lose our veterans office is a shame. According to government data, the office had 2,600 clients with over 4,000 inquiries, generally speaking, so people have been affected by the closure of the office.

It is important for people to understand what a veterans office does. These offices help our veterans facilitate their lives so they can focus on looking for employment or getting into educational programs. I am not speaking only of World War II vets, Korea vets, or our men and women in peace missions. I am also speaking of our Afghanistan vets and Gulf War vets.

• (1655)

They had a choice, and losing that office was significant. Yes, one staff person was moved over and there is a kiosk. Great. That is not enough. That is not good enough. There were 14 effective people. It was not just me saying it. The Legion was saying no, the North Wall Riders were saying no, Afghanistan veterans were saying no, and the City of Windsor resolutions were saying no, all at a time when there was over \$1 billion in available funds for veterans.

What were employees doing at the veterans office? They were helping people with pensions, disability or death benefits, economic support in the form of allowances, and health care benefits and services; assessment services for Canadian Forces and Merchant Navy veterans who served in the First World War, Second World War, the Korean War, and the other wars that have taken place, including Afghanistan; civilian war allowances for wartime services; and assistance with filing forms. Those are just some of the things veterans actually got in the Windsor veterans office.

The government closed a bunch of offices around the country, and New Democrats asked what the savings were, because according to the government, it had to close the offices out of fiscal prudence. What did it save? In Charlottetown, it saved less than \$1 million; in Corner Brook, it saved around \$360,000; in Sydney, it saved less than \$1 million; in Windsor, it saved less than \$1 million; in Thunder Bay, it saved \$650,000; in Kelowna, it saved \$667,000; for Prince George, data was not available; in Saskatoon, it saved less than \$1 million; and in Brandon, it saved just over \$300,000.

Government Orders

That is what happened, and now there is a contraction of other civil service jobs and positions. In Windsor, the most efficient service station in terms of sorting mail at Canada Post, which won awards, was packed up and moved to London, Ontario. Now the mail goes to London on trucks and comes back after being sorted. It is terribly inefficient, and we lost a bunch of jobs. There are also the impending cuts in home delivery. Again, these are missed opportunities for veterans to be part of the civil service.

The Veterans Affairs offices closed, as I talked about already. Veterans could have worked there, but they are closed. The Canadian Forces recruitment office was the first to go. After being poached for so many years, the recruitment office was closed, so there are no jobs there for veterans.

The consulate office in Detroit was a great opportunity. That was a very effective office and did a lot of good work in economic development. A lot of veterans with international experience would be well suited to serve in that office, especially in the Windsor-Detroit corridor.

There is a new border crossing. We have many languages and some of the most diverse cultures in the country and the world. Language skills would have been great, very effective, and important for our economy. There are cuts coming to VIA Rail, and there have been cuts to Service Canada as well.

The bill truly is a missed opportunity. It is a missed opportunity, because structurally, it is set up in a way that is not going to take full advantage of what we could do for veterans. I am sad about that. I am sad that we are not going to improve that. Again, this cannot be symbolic; it has to have real results. Maybe the government will actually measure the results and do the right thing to fix the legislation when it fails.

• (1700)

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Sadia Groguhé (Saint-Lambert, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his speech.

There is no doubt that with Bill C-27, the government has once again created a huge gap between the reality my colleague mentioned, that is, the many cuts to the public service where our veterans should have been able to find work, and this bill, which suggests that these veterans can go work in the public service.

My colleague talked about that during his speech, but he did not mention the fact that the government did not include the RCMP in this bill. What are my colleague's thoughts on that?

• (1705)

[*English*]

Mr. Brian Masse: Mr. Speaker, I was remiss. It was in my notes to mention that, but I did not.

I think it is unfortunate that the RCMP are not included, because it is a profession with unusual risks and challenges. I think we could do better by including them in the bill, especially given the fact that they have also been asked to go into other theatres internationally to assist with training and development. That could bring some really good skill sets to the table. I am puzzled as to why the RCMP have not been part of this. I wish they were.

Mr. Erin O'Toole (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of International Trade, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have listened intently to the debate and appreciate the member's contribution to it.

I would note that his neighbour, the member for Windsor—Tecumseh, has a veteran working in his office, so in fact, New Democrats offices in that area are an example of the opportunities for our veterans to work with the government.

I will ask the member this question, and it is an important question. In opposition, it is easy to just oppose, but in government, we have to ask, "Can we do things better? Can we reach more veterans? Can we address rising needs?" I think we all, in this House, agree that mental health is one of those rising needs.

Should a government continue to keep open a few offices that were seeing a declining use of administrative support only, with fewer, in some cases, than 10 people in them a day, when there are other government offices nearby that did not exist when they were opened in the 1950s, or should there be a move to open 17, soon to be 25, operational stress injury clinics to deliver front-line health care to veterans who are suffering?

How would the hon. member answer that question?

Mr. Brian Masse: Mr. Speaker, Bruce Moncur has contributed quite a bit to veterans services. That is the gentleman the hon. member was referring to. I have his paper that outlines the extra cost for veterans travelling, which they will have to front themselves. Often going from places like Thunder Bay to Winnipeg can cost over \$1,000.

It is a false choice to suggest that we have to close our veterans offices so we can open up new clinics. There is money there. There is over \$1 billion. It is about choices. It is also about respect. It is about going to a community like Windsor, asking the men and women there to serve, and then taking away a service they want.

Generally speaking, there were around 4,000-plus inquiries at the Windsor office per year. Inquiries came from physical visits, emails, and phone calls, but service delivery was being provided by people in confidence.

Now veterans have to go out to Service Canada offices. If they have to deal with stigma, they have to go see a person, and everyone knows. In a small community like Windsor, with 200,000 people, we know each other. We know our histories, we know our issues, and we know our challenges. For the amount of money, the million dollars, the government saved, for the grief it causes people, I say congratulations.

Mr. Randall Garrison (Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise today to speak in favour of Bill C-27 at third reading. However, like my colleague from Windsor West, who just finished speaking, I regard it as a positive, but also largely a missed opportunity.

Government Orders

My riding in Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca is what most would call a military riding. Together, the base and shipyards make up the largest employment site in my riding. I do not want to neglect to mention that health care and education are also large employers, and in those areas the provincial government is the main employer. I should also mention the very vibrant small business dominated tourism industry. My point here is that the base and shipyards are at the heart of my riding.

As the home of Canada's Pacific fleet, we have 4,000 active members stationed at CFB Esquimalt and there are an additional 2,000 civilian employees at the base. When we add on another 600 and soon to be 1,000 people working in the shipyards, we have nearly 7,000 people commuting to work everyday in the centre of my riding.

I do not want to veer off-track here. I will save for another day the discussion of ensuring the federal government and VIA Rail keep their promise to get the E&N railway up and running again so we can help get those people to work. Another day, we can talk about things like HOV lanes to help with the traffic.

What the employment structure of my riding means in terms of this bill is that I have a riding with lots of veterans. Many of them served at CFB Esquimalt, coming originally from all over the country and then staying on after leaving the forces, either for better job prospects than at home or maybe in some cases because it does not snow very often in my riding, but most often because their spouses and families have put down roots in Victoria. It also means we have a lot of injured and disabled veterans in greater Victoria, again both because of the availability of medical services and also, for those with mobility challenges, the lack of snow is a significant factor.

Unfortunately, it is a fact that the federal government is now a shrinking employer in my riding. With nearly 37,000 jobs already lost across the country, we are only going to see more shrinkage in federal employment. I say “unfortunately” for two reasons.

One is that almost all of these were good, family supporting jobs that contributed to a healthy community, and those jobs will no longer be available to veterans in my community.

The other reason is the loss of federal jobs almost always means a loss of federal services locally, like my colleague from Windsor West was discussing with the closure of the veterans office. In fact, in my riding we have just learned that we are about to be the next to lose more federal jobs, as home delivery of mail is up for elimination early in the next year in my riding. When Canada Post officials say that no jobs will be lost, what it means is it will do its best to ensure it keeps its existing employees. The positions, those good-paying, stable jobs will be lost in my community and, again, they are jobs that were often very valuable to veterans who wanted to stay in greater Victoria.

The result of the shrinking public service combined with the shrinking employment in crown corporations, like Canada Post, creates what economists like to call a more competitive job market. In plain English, that means it is tougher for everyone to find a job. It will be tougher for veterans in my riding, but especially for injured

veterans, and it will be tougher for everyone to find a full-time, permanent job that pays a living wage.

Let me be clear. Before I begin talking about some of the concerns I have about Bill C-27, I do support this bill, even if the result ends up being just one more injured vet getting a good job in my riding. I hoped this bill would do more than that, but I fear its results will be quite limited.

The bill is in fact quite narrow in its proposed impact. Not only will the bill's potential impact be limited to those who want to work in the public service, but its impact is further limited to those who already have the qualifications often required for public service employment, like post-secondary degrees. There is no provision in this bill for those who might want to retrain to get those better jobs in the public service, and the length of the qualification period for being on the priority list also works against those veterans who want to retrain.

While I would like to believe that public service employers already place a high value on veterans' military experience in providing good employees with positive qualities like an understanding of the value of discipline and the value of teamwork, clearly this is not always the case. I accept that this bill will help bridge that gap by giving explicit priority to injured veterans.

We hope the Conservative government's intention with this bill is not simply to mask the general shortcomings of its programs for veterans and, even more specifically, the limited success of its career transition services. The minister has already received useful advice on how to improve transition services for veterans from both the Veterans Ombudsman and the Auditor General. There are many good recommendations from both of these officers of Parliament: the Veterans' Ombudsman's report in 2013 and the Auditor General's report in the fall of 2012. Unfortunately, these good recommendations are still awaiting adoption by the government.

● (1710)

Today, Auditor General Michael Ferguson released his report on mental health services for veterans, something that is very closely related to the ability to get good family-supporting jobs. His conclusion is that there are too many barriers to veterans receiving mental health services, and that waits for both assessments and services are far too long.

Government Orders

Some of the things he talked about seem like they should be easily fixable. I hope that the Minister of Veterans Affairs and the Minister of National Defence will act quickly to end the delays in transferring records from the Canadian Forces and DND to Veterans Affairs. Ferguson noted that it still takes 16 weeks to get records transferred and that nothing can happen on a file in terms of getting veterans services until those records are transferred.

He also criticized the application process for disability benefits at Veterans Affairs as too slow and unnecessarily complicated. I hope the minister will act quickly on the recommendation to simplify the application process. Ferguson noted that the wait for an assessment, once records have already been transferred, can take another four months. Therefore, the average wait time for a referral is three months, not the three weeks the department set as its own service standard.

Until veterans get the services they need to deal with their physical disabilities or with their stress-related injuries, they cannot really get started on these employment placement programs. Certainly, we can all agree that taking eight months for the assessment that establishes that a veteran is even eligible for services, before any treatment can actually start, is far too long.

Even once that assessment is finished, the delays are not over. The wait for treatment at the operational and trauma stress support centres, where mental health services for conditions such as PTSD are delivered is nearly two months at more than half the centres.

Therefore, I was glad to hear the government announce additional funding for mental health services for veterans yesterday, but I am sorry to see that it was done only in the face of the impending report from the Auditor General that points out the lack of services and the failings of the government in this area.

While I do support the bill, limited as it is, it remains clear that the government could have gone much further. It could have looked beyond the small number of veterans in transition who have the qualifications, training, and experience necessary to pursue a job in the public service.

The bill does, however, contain a flaw that we in the NDP have opposed wherever it has appeared. Specifically, the bill creates several categories of veterans depending on where and how long they have served. It even creates separate categories of surviving spouses, with differential benefits and qualifications, based on where and how long their spouses served. This violates what should be a basic principle. We in the NDP have always argued that a veteran is a veteran, and we will continue to do so. Also, the bill excludes ex-RCMP members. We can see very little reason for treating ex-RCMP members differently from Canadian Forces veterans.

However, I do not want to lose sight of the chief virtue of the bill, which is giving the highest priority to injured vets for public service jobs. Nor do I wish to diminish the importance of lengthening the eligibility period for placements from two to five years. These are significant improvements. However, we also have to remember that the existing priority hiring program has managed to find jobs for only a little over half of those added to the priority list each year. Between 50% and 80% of those hired each year were hired by DND. In my riding that is significant, because there are a lot of civilian

employees of DND, but most other government departments have hired fewer than 10 vets under this program. The government can and must do better.

When I talk with veterans about employment for injured vets, they have a lot of other concerns on their minds before the priority placement program. That became very clear when the NDP leader and I sat down at the Esquimalt Legion last year to talk face to face with injured vets. The vets started with a condemnation of the unseemly rush to get injured Canadian Forces members out of the forces. Also, they always touched on the number of homeless vets in my riding who are either couch surfing or living in basements or garages of family and friends, or living in tents in the bush in rural parts of my riding.

My recent conversations with injured vets have included questions about how the Conservative minister could have returned \$1.1 billion to the treasury last year, unexpended.

Let me just make one last statement on Bill C-27. I hope that we will honour our veterans by giving them the assistance they need and deserve in return for their service to Canada, whether it is injured vets getting back to work or those who have left us getting the respect they deserve with assistance for a dignified burial.

● (1715)

Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Mr. Speaker, my friend represents a constituency on Vancouver Island that has a great number of active and serving members, as well as those who have sought to retire.

I was reading the Auditor General's report and there is one aspect that I wanted to ask him about. The Auditor General, quite rightly and quite importantly, points out that the delays in services to veterans, particularly mental health services, are causing a great deal of harm to those who have already been harmed, particularly when it comes to mental health and PTSD issues.

With connection to this piece of legislation, as my colleague pointed out in his speech, we have seen the government rush to make a whole series of spending announcements to blunt this criticism. We can understand why veterans may be a little skeptical, because they have seen these announcements before. I think that "skeptical" is the appropriate word, because they have seen the announcements and then proof that the services are not there.

Private Members' Business

The government has put forward a program that may help veterans find jobs. Is there not a connection between those who need and are seeking mental services and their ability to acquire and retain a job in the private sector, having come out of the military? It is a cultural shift already to go into the private sector. Many veterans tell us about this. If they are also dealing with mental health issues and the services have been delayed, is it not incumbent upon the government to have full responsibility to our brave men and women?

• (1720)

Mr. Randall Garrison: Mr. Speaker, as I touched on briefly in my speech, I do think there is a direct connection here. If those who have suffered either physical or emotional injuries as a part of their service to Canada cannot get these taken care of, they cannot really move on to that transition to civilian life and those good jobs.

Again, when we sat down with injured veterans in my riding, they actually believed that when the government budgeted money to spend on veterans, it meant that it would spend that money on veterans. They did not believe that at the end of the year, over a billion dollars would be returned to the Treasury Board, especially when we have many cases in my riding where we have to work with veterans to get very basic things. We just recently won a case for a veteran to get a crown on his tooth, something that would seem to be essential to people's lives. They are seeing that billion dollars returned to the treasury when they are being told that the government cannot afford to help them out with those basics.

Hon. John Duncan (Minister of State and Chief Government Whip, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to say that I have about 8,000 or 9,000 veterans in my riding. I have CFB Comox in my riding. I deal with veterans' issues all the time.

The characterization that I heard from the opposition just now was that a billion dollars was returned this year or from last year. I am sorry, but that is a cumulative number. It is an average of 4% that is being unspent. We have to budget according to the fact that all of our statutory requirements will be taken up, so this is a normal way to budget, making sure that all of the funds are in place.

The mental health of our veterans is vital. I am working with people all of the time, as the member for the southern part of Vancouver Island is.

This should be characterized as the government's major, positive changes, as opposed to what I am hearing from the member. We are doing what we can, and I think that we have accomplished a lot. There is more to do. There will always be more to do. That is in the nature of a comment, rather than a question.

Mr. Randall Garrison: Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. Chief Government Whip for his question. I have a great deal of respect for him as a representative of his riding. I know that he regularly comes down to Victoria to participate in events honouring veterans.

I apologize if, in the heat of the moment, I misspoke about the term over which the money had been saved, but it is still \$1.1 billion that would have been spent on veterans. From talking to veterans in my riding, it is their perception that this money was planned for benefits for veterans and ought to have been spent on them, because they face long waiting lists to get the benefits they really deserve.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): Resuming debate. Is the House ready for the question?

Some hon. members: Question.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): The question is on the motion. Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

(Motion agreed to, bill read the third time and passed)

• (1725)

Hon. John Duncan: Mr. Speaker, I would ask that we see the clock at 5:30 p.m.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

PRIVATE MEMBER'S BUSINESS

[English]

CARE FOR VETERANS

The House resumed from October 20 consideration of the motion.

Mr. David Sweet (Ancaster—Dundas—Flamborough—Westdale, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is always an honour to address the House. I am pleased to speak tonight to Motion No. 532, care for veterans, put forward by my colleague, the hon. member for Edmonton Centre.

This motion calls on the government to examine all possible options to ensure a fully unified “continuum of care” approach is in place to serve Canada's men and women in uniform and veterans so as to eliminate all unnecessary bureaucratic processes within and between departments related to service delivery; eliminate duplication and overlap in the delivery of available services and supports; further improve care and support, particularly for seriously injured veterans; provide continuous support for the families of veterans during and after service; and strengthen the connections between the Canadian Armed Forces, the Department of National Defence, and Veterans Affairs Canada.

We owe the Canadians who have given so much to our country nothing less than this.

To emphasize this point, I want to take members back a month to the last week of October.

On behalf of a shocked nation, the Prime Minister attended the funeral of Corporal Nathan Cirillo in Hamilton. As this was taking place in my hometown of Hamilton, it was a privilege and an honour for me to attend with the Prime Minister.

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There were a lot of tears and tributes on that day. I remember it well. I parked my car about a kilometre and a half outside of the perimeter the police had made for security and walked down to the church where the funeral was taking place. People were three and four deep on the streets. I and many of the media estimated that there must have been 50,000 to 60,000 people standing on the street waiting for the funeral march from Bayfront Park up to the church.

I remember being struck by the silence of the crowd of people who were there in reverence to the price that Corporal Cirillo paid. After the funeral, which was about an hour long, what really moved me when I left the church was that they had not moved at all, because they were so overwhelmed by what had happened. That, to me, epitomizes what we mean when we say our women and men in uniform and our veterans deserve no less. It epitomizes what the hon. member for Edmonton Centre is trying to do with this motion. It is what the people who lined the streets of Hamilton that day would want us to do in support of our armed forces personnel and veterans.

In speaking to this motion, and as a member of the Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs from 2006 to 2010, I would like to highlight some of the ways our government has already improved care and services to veterans and to those members of the armed forces who were injured in the course of their service to Canada.

I would first note that our government has helped those members of the Canadian Armed Forces who were injured, mentally or physically, in the line of duty to continue to serve their country, which is unprecedented. As we are well aware, injuries to members of the Canadian Armed Forces in the course of their duties are a risk they always face. Some of the work they undertake is dangerous, and while much is done to try to mitigate the risks, there is always the potential for something to go wrong. When it does, the Canadian Armed Forces is there to help.

One example of this is Captain Simon Mailloux. Captain Mailloux was injured in Kandahar, Afghanistan, in November 2007. He was in command of a combat team that had left its patrol base to conduct a night operation. Shortly after the team left the compound to conduct the operation, the command vehicle was hit by an IED. Because of the injuries Captain Mailloux sustained from the blast, his left leg was amputated below the knee.

Mailloux's story does not end there, though. With the support of his fellow brothers in arms, he pushed himself through rehabilitation. He returned to service as the aide-de-camp to the Governor General and eventually redeployed to Afghanistan as a combatant for a second tour.

Captain Mailloux is a great example of the success of rehabilitation and the possibilities that exist for Canadian Armed Forces members who are injured in the line of duty to return to active duty. Granted, this will not always be the case, but it can happen, and the successes should be noted. As I mentioned before, this really is unprecedented.

However, injuries are not all physical. Some of our personnel are injured in mind. Those who have suffered physical injuries and those who have not can also face the challenge of post-traumatic stress disorder. I would like to highlight an example of a success in that area as well.

● (1730)

Master Warrant Officer Clarke tells the story of his challenges with PTSD in his own words on the Canadian Armed Forces website, but I will paraphrase it here because time is limited.

Master Warrant Officer Clarke was a member of the forces in 1989 when his Hercules aircraft crashed in Alaska. Eight of his comrades were killed in the crash. Around the same time in his life, a close friend of his took his own life and Master Warrant Officer Clarke suffered an accident. These issues began to take a toll on him.

Due to the combination of these events and a serious accident that happened to him during a tour in Bosnia, his life began to spiral out of control. Alcohol abuse, divorce, and financial difficulties ensued. Initially, he was reluctant to come forward and admit he was struggling mentally. He wanted to be a strong soldier and he used to tell his younger recruits that his feelings had been removed, although Master Warrant Officer Clarke admits that was not actually true.

Eventually, Master Warrant Officer Clarke decided to seek help, and he states that when he did, his chain of command and the Canadian Forces supported him. In the article I am referencing from forces.gc.ca, which was posted February 28, 2014, Master Warrant Officer Clarke states:

The Canadian Forces has given me help through my chain of command, they have supported me, given me my case manager, my psychiatrist, my psychologist, my addictions counsellor. They have all supported me and got me to where I am today.

These are great examples of how Canadian Armed Forces members, injured in mind and body, have recuperated and returned to active duty. There will always be more to do and more ways we can support them, but these successes need highlighting as much as the cases in which challenges remain.

I would also like to highlight the lack of public awareness around the award available to seriously ill and injured veterans.

For a seriously ill or injured veteran, there exists an award from Veterans Affairs Canada of up to \$300,000. In addition to this, there exists a benefit through the SISIP program that most Canadian Armed Forces personnel pay into. This award is around \$250,000. For those seriously injured as a result of their service, there exists more than half a million dollars in tax-free awards. These awards can be paid out in a lump sum or over the lifetime of the service member or veteran. This is in addition to the earnings loss benefit and permanent impairment allowance that veterans are eligible for as well.

As the mission in Afghanistan wound down, the issues of post traumatic stress disorder and mental health more broadly have come up. With more than 40,000 Canadian Armed Forces members having served in Afghanistan and having engaged in a very intense combat mission there for six years, a number of armed forces personnel and veterans have struggled with PTSD and mental health. Our government has acted in the face of this issue and has created the joint personnel support unit, with eight regional commands across the country and satellite offices at more than 30 locations throughout Canada.

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In fact, as the Minister of Justice often used to say when he was the Minister of National Defence, there is such a demand for mental health workers, psychologists, psychiatrists, and psychotherapists in the Canadian Armed Forces that there is in fact a shortfall in the private sector.

I would contend that as part of our effort to improve services to our veterans further, we should have a constructive dialogue with mental health professionals to see how we could better meet demand and ensure that mental health professionals going to work for the armed forces have all the specializations they need to be as effective at their work as possible.

I would also like to highlight another element of the efforts being made at improving mental health for our armed forces. Just this past Sunday, the Minister of Veterans Affairs, the Minister of National Defence, and the Minister of Justice announced in Halifax an investment of more than \$200 million over six years in improvements to mental health care for Canadian Armed Forces personnel, veterans, and their families.

Let me conclude with these words. We must improve care and support to seriously ill and injured veterans. This is our collective duty to Canadians. We must ensure that continuous support during and after military service is provided to the families of those who serve Canada. The recent announcement in Halifax takes significant steps to improving this care, but more will always remain to be done.

● (1735)

Finally, we must strengthen the connections between the Canadian Armed Forces, the Department of National Defence, and Veterans Affairs Canada. The transition by a Canadian Armed Forces member from the care of the Canadian Armed Forces and the Department of National Defence to the care of Veterans Affairs Canada must be seamless. While this transition has been greatly improved, it could still be better. Work remains for us to do on that.

I believe that if the House adopts Motion No. 532, we will be expressing our support for further enhancing and improving care for members of the Canadian Armed Forces and our veterans. Those who have given so much to Canada deserve nothing less than the best. I wholeheartedly urge all members to support Motion No. 532 to ensure that our veterans receive the best care that they can get.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is with pleasure that I rise today. I think it is very timely that this particular motion is before us, as we have had Canada's Auditor General bring down a fairly condemning report on the government's actions, or lack thereof, in regard to our veterans.

In question period today, the leader of the Liberal Party said it quite well. I would like to repeat the actual question. It highlights the deficiencies of the current government and the need for it to acknowledge that there is room for improvement on the veterans file.

This is the first question my leader posed to the Prime Minister earlier today. He said, "we have a sacred obligation to our veterans, but too many are struggling, alone, against mental illness. The Auditor General has concluded that the current government is failing them. Since 2006, there are 128 veterans who have waited three to seven years to find out if they even qualify for mental health benefits. How could the Prime Minister let this happen?"

In the second question my leader put forward, again to the Prime Minister, he said, "in the past decade, we have lost more men and women in uniform to suicide than we did in Afghanistan. The Auditor General's report said that mental health support for our veterans is very slow, complex, poorly communicated, not tracked, and not comprehensive enough. Why would the Prime Minister deliberately underspend over a billion dollars in veterans funding?"

These are two statements that we, as an opposition party, levelled at the Prime Minister today. If people want to get an understanding of the response we got from the Prime Minister, they only need to read *Hansard*.

The government is in complete denial in terms of the disservice to our veterans by not maintaining its commitment through budgetary means.

I believe that as a caucus, eight of our nine questions dealt with this very important issue today during question period, which followed the Auditor General's report.

Veterans are seeking long-term mental health support, but they are not being given that support in a timely fashion. Access to the programs and services veterans need are of critical importance, yet the government is not giving the type of response that is necessary. Far too many veterans are forced to wait in excess of eight months to access benefits.

As my colleague, the critic for Veterans Affairs, has pointed out, virtually one in five, which is 20% of our veterans, are having to wait months on end. That is just not acceptable. With what we ask our military personnel to do, it is not acceptable for us to deliver that kind of service.

The report concluded that Veterans Affairs is largely unconcerned with how well veterans are being served and whether programs are even making a difference in their lives. The Conservative government has been unable to establish the effectiveness of mental health services for veterans. Current funding for veterans' mental health is stretched and widely insufficient.

We have consistently asked that the government invest more resources in terms of mental illness among our veterans. There is so much more we could be doing.

● (1740)

The government says that it has record numbers of positions, but if those positions are not filled, there is no record number. There is record high demand for services that the government has not been able to meet.

Consider that \$1.13 billion, some hundreds of millions of dollars, has been left unspent since 2006. At the same time, the Conservatives spent \$740 million on, I would ultimately argue, political, self-serving advertising. They are indeed selling our veterans short.

It is interesting when Conservatives try to give the impression that they have done our veterans a service by closing down service centres across Canada. After all, the member implied that those were not being utilized and that there are Legions where veterans can go to get the service they might require.

That is just wrong. The outreach service centres that were opened in communities like Brandon and others in different regions of our country were providing a very valuable service to Canadians.

When the Conservatives tried to give the impression that they needed to do that to save costs, among other things, only for us to then find out that they had underspent by hundreds of millions of dollars, it was fairly tough to understand and appreciate.

The Conservatives have fallen short in delivering the critical services our veterans require. At the same time, they have not been able to spend the money that was allocated. Those nine VAC centres were closed, yet we are still aware of many veterans who are still waiting for case workers. As the leader of the Liberal Party pointed out, we have a sacred obligation to our veterans. I have heard that consistently, whether from the critic of the Liberal Party or the leader of the Liberal Party and others. On Remembrance Day when we had individuals from each political party stand in their place, the member for Guelph in particular talked about that sacred obligation and the sacrifices that are being made.

The Conservatives are not upholding that covenant that we have with our men and women of the Canadian Forces. My colleague has already had the opportunity to put some words on the record, indicating that in principle we support what is being talked about in the motion, but it would be wrong for us not to recognize the many inefficiencies of the government in delivering the critically important services our veterans deserve.

We are hoping in this debate that when it comes to a vote, the government members will reflect on what has taken place over the last couple of years. When the government comes up with a couple of hundred million dollars, it is just too little, too late, and there is so much more that we could have and should have been doing.

I appreciate and thank you for the opportunity to say a few words, Mr. Speaker.

● (1745)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Jean Rousseau (Compton—Stanstead, NDP): Mr. Speaker, all the members who have spoken to this point have basically said the same thing. Yes, we really need to support our veterans, regardless of what combat zone or war they fought in or what service they rendered. It is important to do that. That is why the motion moved by the member for Châteauguay—Saint-Constant is of the utmost importance.

Too often it takes a sad event to remind us just how important it is to take proper care of the men and women who served or are still serving our country. It is up to the legislators to ensure that absolutely every effort is made to respond to the claims of veterans and soldiers.

In my riding, there are veterans from Afghanistan, the Korean War and even half a dozen World War II veterans. Some of them

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participated in the recent Remembrance Day ceremonies. They are all very proud of what they accomplished. They all recognize how important it is for Canada to keep its commitments and to provide adequate services, whether it be health care or other services.

During the last parliamentary recess, I was honoured and proud to participate in many Remembrance Day activities. Over 15 such events were held in the riding of Compton—Stanstead. I attended nine of them. It is always an honour to meet with veterans because they gave so much to our country.

Where is the sense of humanity, compassion and honour that sometimes seems to be lacking in the debate here in the House and in what is done for our constituents and especially our veterans?

Today, we have before us a motion that says:

That, in the opinion of the House, the government should examine all possible options to ensure a fully unified “continuum of care” approach is in place to serve Canada’s men and women in uniform and veterans...

A “continuum of care” means that they receive health care services when they are being treated for an illness or injury and also after they have been treated as they carry on with their lives. There are always services that can be requested by veterans, modern veterans and soldiers. For that reason, those services must be in place. When a person is up against a bureaucracy, it can be upsetting, and extremely disappointing things can happen. This motion seeks to eliminate all of the red tape within and between departments with regard to service delivery.

It is very difficult for our brave veterans of the Second World War who are still with us. It causes a lot of hassle, especially when they request a service and are told they need to adjust to new technology. Veterans who are 89, 90 or 92 are being asked to turn on a computer, go on the Internet and access services online. That is an insult. That even happened at a Service Canada office; Service Canada is now taking over from the veterans' service centres. A 92-year-old veteran was placed in front of a computer and given a quick demonstration, so that he could access his services online from now on. That is insulting.

We want to prevent those types of situations. We want veteran care and services to be on a par with the service they gave our country. We also want to support the families of veterans. Once again, those who fought in the Second World War are about 90 or 92.

● (1750)

In recent years, I became aware of a couple, both veterans, married for over 60 years. It was impossible to navigate the administrative maze to ensure that the wife would receive the care she needed, and the husband, who also needed care, told me that he was forced to abandon his wife, who suffered from dementia and Alzheimer's, to her own devices and hospital care.

That couple lived together for over 60 years. They spent their lives together. The veteran told me that his life was over because he could find no way to get the services he needed to continue his relationship with his wife even though she was no longer the same person because of her illness. He said he wanted to spend his last days with his wife but that it was impossible. That is extremely sad.

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There are situations like that all over Canada, even among young veterans who went to Afghanistan, who participated in other more recent wars or who were deployed to Sarajevo. Those veterans have been abandoned.

In the Eastern Townships, a dozen or so veterans get together regularly. They told me that they are the only people they can relate to and that they meet as friends to talk about their lives without judgment. They are trying to figure out how they ended up in this situation, why Canada abandoned them. That is a sad thing to hear, especially when we know what they have done and how proud they are to have served our country. A country like ours, a modern country, should provide these men and women with the services they need.

The Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs tabled a report on improving the new veterans' charter. In its response, the government decided not to invest new funding. Instead, it returned close to \$1 billion to the Treasury Board. One billion dollars was not spent on veterans and was returned to the Treasury Board, when veterans are in need of services all across Canada.

The NDP stood up and said that the loss of veterans' service centres would be very harmful for the public and for soldiers. These service centres were a point of contact for them. They received service from other human beings. When a veteran went to one of these centres, he saw a human being who answered his questions and provided a service, no matter how young or old.

The only thing the veteran wanted was to be served by a person, not an answering machine that often asks us to press four, press two or press five and then makes us wait. A veteran told me that he once waited for more than 90 minutes and the call was disconnected when the time was up. This is unacceptable for our veterans.

That is why this motion is so important. We want to do more than just support the motion. We want something tangible to be done to prove to these veterans of every battle and every unit that we are proud of them and that we will honour their service by taking good care of them.

• (1755)

[English]

Mr. Greg Kerr (West Nova, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am delighted to enter the discussion this evening in support of the motion put forward by my colleague from Edmonton Centre.

I will start off by pointing out that, as chair of the veterans affairs committee, I certainly was pleased that we had unanimous consent and support from all members of the committee to proceed with the report. One of the important recommendations within the report is one that my colleague and friend has been promoting for some time. I think we have all been promoting it.

We sometimes get a little carried away in this place, and I was pleased that did not happen at committee stage. We focused on improving services to veterans and picking up on some of the gaps. We committed ourselves to moving forward. All of us on the committee agreed that there are a lot of great services available to our veterans, as there should be. Are there opportunities to improve? Absolutely. Are there challenges? Of course, there are. We have to focus on where we are going.

To unnecessarily upset veterans is unfortunate, but it does happen, and I realize that this is the political climate. I would like to focus on where we are and where we are going moving forward. We will never get everything done that we think should be done, but that is the nature of the kind of services that we need to provide to our veterans.

The motion refers to one of the things that we have seen and heard for some time is a challenge, and that is the fact that many veterans have slipped through the cracks in getting service in a timely manner. I have heard members from all sides refer to this as incredibly important, and it was the committee's number one recommendation.

Veterans are often transitioned out of DND, and they end up in Veterans Affairs. There can be gaps of time in getting the appropriate services that they deserve. We all agree that is an important challenge to face. We do not know what these two departments do together or how united they become in the end result, but we are absolutely committed to making sure that when somebody leaves DND and enters veterans services that they are entering a seamless and absolutely supportive system. We are committed to making sure that they do not have to spend months waiting to go from one department to another, one bureaucracy to another bureaucracy.

I spoke to one lady during the committee process who had gone through the system. She was a medical person, and even with her knowledge she waited for over 12 months to be transitioned from DND to Veterans Affairs.

Part of the problem that these individuals face is the interpretation of the degree of the problem, or the medical challenge that they face, the recognition by Veterans Affairs that if they left DND with some serious challenges, they should automatically be accepted by Veterans Affairs. Unfortunately, for some reason that has become a problem for many of our veterans.

People with medical challenges who have done their service feel that they are alone, that there are not enough services available to them, even though there are all kinds of terrific services. The problem they face is accessing those services. That is the critical entry point. My friend and colleague's motion says that we should keep the pressure on, that we need to keep focusing on where we are going.

There were 14 major recommendations that the committee felt the government should focus on. Most of the organizations and groups agreed that these recommendations are the timely and important ones. The ombudsman said they are important, and he wants to make sure that we continue to be focused on them. The government has accepted some of the recommendations up front, and it continues to add its support and acceptance of the recommendations. As we continue down this road, our job is to make sure that all of the recommendations are enacted and supported. Our veterans deserve that. We all agree that it is the right thing to do.

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It is important, as well, that we do not unnecessarily confuse or alarm our veterans. Many veterans get great service, and they are happy to get it. However, there is no question that there are those who are going to be difficult. There are also those who will probably never be happy with what we do, but that should never stop us or get us off course in doing what is right for our veterans.

• (1800)

Doing what is right for our veterans is consulting with them, listening to them and then acting in the best possible way on behalf of them and the taxpayers to deliver services that look after their needs for many years to come.

I know that when we finished the committee report, and when we presented it to the government, there was a great feeling that it was a huge step forward. For those who are asking why are they not done, some of these things require us to go back and consult with the veterans' organizations on implementation. We cannot force them. For instance, the family resource centres are being looked at. How do we engage them more? We cannot go out and tell a separate organization that this is what it is going to do. We are here to help, we want to help and organizations should let us know the best way to proceed.

In some cases these things happen quickly and in some cases it takes months of discussion, always with the sense that we must do it, we must complete it, we must get there together to benefit all our veterans. We are absolutely convinced that that is under way and will happen.

For those who are impatient, I would just ask them to look deeper than the lines that are being thrown out here. They should talk to veterans and ask them if they want it done correctly or quickly. They will tell people that of course they would like to have it quickly and correctly, but correctly is far more important. The veterans want long-term support and long-term delivery, and we want to ensure we do it in the right manner to benefit them.

I would also point out that it is important, as we carry through, we keep the dialogue going with the veterans to ask them how we are making out. There are a lot of organizations out there, perhaps there are too many organizations. It is one of those things we have to discuss with them to ensure we hear clear messages as to progress and results. That will continue to happen.

I am delighted that Walt Natynczyk is now the new deputy minister of Veterans Affairs. He was the former chief of the defence staff. He was the head honcho there. For him to be in Veterans Affairs, I really believe the motion that our colleague has raised will become a reality even more efficiently and more quickly, perhaps because he gets it. He understands this issues of appropriate transitions, appropriate delivery of service and appropriate follow-up for the veterans.

He has now seen both sides of the table, and he will help the progress along a great deal. It was a good move on behalf of the government to appoint him as the deputy minister of Veterans Affairs.

I do not think anybody from any party would question the logic of having him as the deputy minister in this transition period. He will

understand the departments, the veterans and he will help us on this course as we move down the road.

It has been frustrating for many of us when we get into this discussion, but I really believe all members, regardless of party, care about and are concerned about veterans. There is no doubt in my mind. Sometimes we get caught up in some misinformation, occasionally. It is not a deliberate thing to misinform, but sometimes that happens. We must be careful that we are unnecessarily confusing the veterans or giving them the wrong information, and I am talking about all sides, all parties.

I am glad my colleague raised the motion. It reminds us there is work to be done. It reminds us that veterans are a top priority. It reminds us that we are making progress. It also reminds us that we must stay vigilant, focused and committed to ensuring we deliver the very best service we can to our veterans.

• (1805)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Robert Aubin (Trois-Rivières, NDP): Mr. Speaker, first of all, I would like to salute all the veterans living in my riding. They can count on the fact that I will work in this place on their behalf at all times, and to the best of my ability, not just by speaking to the motion moved today, but also by helping them with any problem they may face. My riding office is always open to them. They are always welcome to come in, so that together we can find the best solutions as quickly as possible.

I must say that it is November 25 and it was not so long ago that, no matter our political affiliation, we were all preparing to participate in Remembrance Day ceremonies in our respective ridings. There is no doubt in my mind that there was more than just a consensus, that members of Parliament were actually unanimous in recognizing the importance of what we were doing. We were recognizing the duty to remember our veterans every year.

However, this duty to remember should not take place just once a year, as part of an event we celebrate. We have to carry it deep within ourselves, 365 days a year, to ensure that those who did so much for the country can in turn receive what they need.

Even though I support this motion, as my party does, I nevertheless have to point out my concerns with respect to the development and delivery of services. I will guarantee that the services are provided as quickly and consistently as possible.

I would first like to talk about the red tape involved in delivering veterans' services. At present, our veterans have to fill out a mountain of paperwork and go through a lot of red tape in the hope of receiving services and benefits.

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The Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs suggested that the government implement a unified payment system that would result in a single monthly payment to the veteran. This measure would simplify things, it would be easy to implement and it would be efficient, because it would prevent mistakes arising from the multitude of administrative forms, mistakes that delay veterans' access to the benefits they are waiting for.

The government's promise in response to this recommendation was nothing but empty words. It did not truly commit to easing the administrative burden for our veterans. The Conservatives did not stop there, and I will share some other examples.

One example is the duplication of programs. Members of the Canadian Armed Forces contribute to the life insurance plan included in the service income security insurance plan. However, Veterans Affairs Canada already offers several programs under this plan. That is why the Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs and the Veterans Ombudsman jointly recommended that VAC no longer offer SISIP programs.

The Veterans Ombudsman called for the Minister of Veterans Affairs to work with the Minister of National Defence on an independent review to determine whether it was efficient to have duplicate programs. I must point out that what we are all looking for is the most efficient way to provide services as quickly as possible to those who have already rendered the service we asked of them.

Since enlightenment comes when ideas collide, the government's response reflects the meeting of these two great minds—the two ministers I just mentioned. I would like to share a quote to illustrate the concerns I still have:

The Government agrees in principle with this proposal and will explore options for addressing the recommendation.

● (1810)

I read that many times, in one form or another, in the government's responses to the reports. All too often the answer is “yes, but” or “yes, however” or “yes, but later”, when what we need is meaningful action right now.

While government action is going into hibernation, our veterans feel as though they are being abandoned once they leave the Canadian Armed Forces. They are suffering from the lack of support and assistance when it comes to health care. That is why the committee suggested that the government should be more proactive by ensuring that health care is provided to all military personnel before they leave the Canadian Armed Forces.

Military personnel leaving the armed forces to become veterans need to be supported by a continuum of care, because many illnesses can emerge years after they have left the forces. I am thinking of illnesses related to mental health in particular, such as PTSD, which can emerge much later and can adversely affect the health of our veterans, as well as the health of the people around them. Also, the closing of the last hospital dedicated to veterans is not helping matters in terms of the problems they face every day with their families.

To make matters worse, modern veterans are excluded from the long-term care program offered to those who fought in the Second World War and the Korean War.

More generally speaking, the statistics published by the Veterans Ombudsman are extremely alarming. A total of 1,428 veterans out of 76,446 Canadian Forces veteran clients were assessed by Veterans Affairs Canada to be totally and permanently incapacitated.

Those statistics are alarming, but a lack of statistics in other areas is even more worrisome. Veterans Affairs Canada does not even have any statistics about the rate of suicide among veterans, despite the recommendations of the National Defence and Canadian Forces Ombudsman and the Veterans Ombudsman. That gives us an idea of the work that still needs to be done in this file, work that cannot be done fast enough, given the existing needs.

The government does not have a stellar track record financially speaking either. A total of \$1.1 billion was not used for its intended purpose and was returned to the government treasury. Recently, the government announced a \$200 million program. We are not going to say no to that money, but veterans need both that \$200 million and the \$1.1 billion.

I digress. After the committee recommended that Veterans Affairs Canada increase the level of compensation, the government showed, yet again, a “great interest” in the recommendation. Here is another quote, as noteworthy as the first:

The Government agrees in principle with this proposal and will explore options for addressing the recommendation.

That is a perfect example of bureaucratese, of language void of all meaning. This government has become a master in the art of deciding to think about exploring its options. That is the kind of effective government responses that are being proposed. We on this side of the House, both sides of the House even, and especially veterans, are expecting something far more effective than that.

While the government is meditating on this, the NDP is proposing meaningful and effective solutions to modernize the new veterans charter in its entirety. Speaking of the new charter, if we were to look at the time it took to implement it, I am not even sure it could be called a “new charter”. In this case, “new” more likely means the latest on the list.

Since I am quickly running out of time, I will skip over a few remarks and jump right to my conclusion. The NDP supports this motion because, as I said, there is more than just a consensus; everyone in this House unanimously agrees that we should give our veterans their due. More than ever, by supporting this motion, the NDP is reiterating its support for our veterans, in terms of medical and financial assistance, as well as support for their families, who are too often marginalized.

● (1815)

I hope we can set aside our partisan differences and I hope all members of this House will support this motion in recognition of the sacred duty that all responsible governments have towards their veterans.

Private Members' Business

[English]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): There being no further debate, accordingly, we will invite the hon. member for Edmonton Centre for his right of reply. The hon. member has up to five minutes.

The hon. member for Edmonton Centre.

Hon. Laurie Hawn (Edmonton Centre, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure to rise again and wrap up this debate. I am not going to bother going over the text of private member's Motion No. 532. It has been alluded to a number of times. Suffice it to say, it will provide a significant step toward closing the gaps in the service transition between the Department of National Defence and Veterans Affairs. There are gaps that exist, which we know about.

I appreciate the support. I know it is going to be passed—I assume unanimously. Notwithstanding the rhetoric we have heard today and heard the last time, which is a completely false narrative, we have acknowledged that there are issues. We have always acknowledged the issues. I have lived through some of those issues as a veteran. However, the narrative we heard today and the last time is very false.

The thing I like about private member's Motion No. 532, other than that it is mine, is that it really is in lock step with the 14 recommendations in the Veterans Affairs committee report tabled in June of this year.

The first one, and my colleague from the Maritimes mentioned it earlier, is not letting someone leave uniform until they are completely holding hands with Veterans Affairs, that everything has been adjudicated, the caseworkers have been identified, that the services are ready when they walk in the door, and that there is a whole bunch of other things covered in there.

The announcements made a couple of days ago addressed three of those recommendations, and there are more to come. This is progress and that is what this is about, making progress in what really is a never-ending quest to give veterans what they need. That process is not immediate. People ask why it is not happening right now. No government can ignore the legal, regulatory, and statutory process that is in place. We would all like it to go faster. That is just not reality; every government has to follow that procedure.

The previous speaker mentioned that we were using bafflegab. No, we have to engage. Sometimes we have to engage with the Department of Finance. We have to engage with DND and VAC. We have to engage with Treasury Board. There are a lot of things that, by law, have to be done and we have to get that right.

The Auditor General's report in fact relates to my private member's motion. He addresses a lot of legitimate things. They are covered by that, but also covered by the 14 recommendations in the committee's report.

The Auditor General's report is not all negative, despite the rhetoric we hear from the opposition and the media, who will never talk about anything good. They will always talk about the negative, because that is what the opposition and media do. One of these days it would be nice to see some more honest balance, but I will not hold my breath.

The Auditor General praised the department for a number of things, such as mental health rehab timelines and the mental health support programs that are in place, and there are many. Eighty-four per cent of eligibility decisions in the rehab program were made within the two-week service standard. That is not bad. The majority of case plans were prepared within 45 days. That is pretty good.

There are legitimate criticisms in the AG's report and we accept those. A lot of those relate directly to the recommendations that we made. Those issues have been ongoing. We did not just start doing this a couple of days ago. Frankly, it has been ongoing for years and will continue. Therefore, to suggest that this is in reaction to something else is simply false.

Was the Auditor General's report a failure? No, it was not. Did it say that more could be done? Yes, absolutely, and we agree with that. Motion No. 532 goes a step in that direction. We are working with Veterans Affairs and the legions and most, but not all, veterans groups out there, because there are some that simply do not want to work in a productive, rational manner.

I have to say something about lapsing because that has been brought up many times. It has been completely falsely reported. If we think of it as a line of credit, VAC gets a line of credit from the government every year and it can spend as much as it wants. If it has to go over that amount, it can get more. The fact is, it depends on who asks for what. If the demand is not there, the money is not spent. The line of credit then gets refilled for the next year and on and on. It is completely false to say that \$1.13 billion was ripped out of veterans programs. They know it is false. I will not use the word "deliberate", but it does cross my mind that it is definitely misleading.

Walt Natynczyk is a brilliant appointment. I know him well. He talked about a continuum of care from a different perspective. I want to end here with this point. He talked about five stages: there is triage after a blast from an IED; then there is diagnosis; then treatment; then family and peer support; and finally, there is individual ownership of their own life. That is the aim of all Veterans Affairs programs, so people can take control of their own lives when the time comes. Motion No. 532 facilitates that.

• (1820)

I appreciate folks' support, and I look forward to this bill passing. It would be one more step in the continuum of care for veterans that they deserve.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): The question is on the motion. Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): All those in favour of the motion will please say yea.

Some hon. members: Yea.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): All those opposed will please say nay.

Adjournment Proceedings

Some hon. members: Nay.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): In my opinion the nays have it.

And five or more members having risen:

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): Pursuant to Standing Order 93, the recorded division stands deferred until Wednesday, November 26, immediately before the time provided for private members' business.

ADJOURNMENT PROCEEDINGS

A motion to adjourn the House under Standing Order 38 deemed to have been moved.

[English]

HOUSING

Mr. Mike Sullivan (York South—Weston, NDP): Mr. Speaker, on October 29, I asked the minister about homelessness in Canada, about homelessness strategies that the government was not employing and the fact that homelessness was getting worse, not better, under the government. The minister's answer was somewhat glib and somewhat non-specific to what has become a crisis in our country.

Homelessness costs Canadians \$7 billion. Beyond that, there is a critical housing shortage.

When my colleague presented Bill C-400 in the House last year, the Conservatives voted against it because they said it would cost \$6.2 billion. The purpose of that bill was to find a way to ensure that everyone in our country had a home. The \$6.2 billion is less than \$7 billion, so it would have been cheaper for the government to have adopted Bill C-400.

In my riding of York South—Weston, close to half the residents are renters and of those, more than 36% spend more than 30% of their income on housing, which is the standard by which the government and the banks determine when people are spending too much. Almost 90% of the renters living in those big concrete towers, which is 45% of my riding, have some form of insecurity attached to their housing, yet the government says that everything is fine.

Close to one-third of those renters are in critical risk of homelessness. They have four or more aspects of their housing that is on the edge, that is either insufficient for the number of people in their household or is costing way too much for them. If they miss one paycheque, they and their children will be out on the street, and nobody wants to see that happen.

In the past few years, the government has signalled that it will not renew some 600,000 affordable housing units that are provided through the co-ops that have agreements with CMHC, with the government. These are coming to an end over the coming years. Many of those co-ops will be unable to continue. They have huge bills that have mounted up over the years because they have been living on the edge and they will be unable to continue once that funding ends.

It is almost criminal for the government to suggest that the funding will end, that the money will return to the treasury and that everything will be rosy when in fact, it has admitted, through its responses on Bill C-400, there is a \$6.2 billion gap in the housing in our country, a \$6.2 billion need for housing. There are 1.2 million households that have some kind of housing need. Those households have an average of \$4,779 of need and the government has decided it will not provide it. It is not going to talk about it because it does not want to know. That is no way to address a real problem.

Some answers have been given to us by those who have written the "State of Homelessness in Canada 2014" report. I would like the government to at least consider these recommendations: a new framework agreement that sets clear priorities and requires local planning between the federal, provincial, and municipal governments; increased Housing First investments that target chronic and episodic homelessness through an expansion of the homelessness partnering strategy; direct investment in affordable housing programs, specifically, federal funding for social housing, co-ops, non-profits, as operating agreements wind down; a housing benefit for those who face a severe affordability problem; a new affordable housing tax credit; and a review and expand involvement in aboriginal housing both on and off reserve.

● (1825)

Mr. Scott Armstrong (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Employment and Social Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is my pleasure to stand here today to address the hon. member's question. The hon. member for York South—Weston has asked the government to explain its position on the issue of long-term funding for affordable housing in Canada, and I am pleased to have the opportunity to respond to this question today.

Let me begin by stating very clearly that my colleagues and I share the hon. member's concern for the well-being of people who find themselves in need of housing.

Our government has made unprecedented investments in affordable housing. We have made those investments over the past number of years, and we will continue to do so. Since 2006, our government, through CMHC, has invested more than \$16.5 billion in housing. These investments have benefited more than 900,000 Canadian individuals and families. Again, this year, the government will provide \$2 billion in housing investments right across this country.

As for the longer term, I am sure that all hon. members of the House will recall that in economic action plan 2013, we renewed the investment in affordable housing until 2019, with \$1.25 billion in funding over five years. Further to that, in recognition of the distinctive needs of northern Canada, our government also announced \$100 million over two years to support the construction of new and affordable housing in Nunavut.

Adjournment Proceedings

The renewal of the investment in affordable housing ensures continuity of federal funding for housing programs across Canada, and I am pleased to say that renewal agreements have now been signed with most provinces and territories, and remaining agreements should be in place very shortly. An important component of these agreements is that provinces and territories match the federal investment in their jurisdictions. They are also responsible for designing and delivering affordable housing programs that meet their local housing needs and priorities.

Hon. members should know that the investment in affordable housing, which of course, was introduced by our government in 2011, is making a huge difference in communities all across Canada. As of September 30, over 200,000 households have benefited from this initiative.

As well, this does not include the hundreds of thousands of Canadian households that benefit from the annual federal subsidy for existing social housing units, both on and off reserve. Provinces and territories also contribute to this funding. This is provided to low-income Canadians through long-term agreements with housing groups. These agreements span 25 to 50 years, and when they mature, the federal government funding will end, as it was always planned to end, because Canadians know that when the mortgage is paid off, they stop paying the bank.

The majority of non-profit and co-operative housing projects are expected to be financially viable and mortgage free at the end of the operating agreements. Housing providers will find themselves with valuable real estate assets and a decrease in operating expenses that can be used to continue to offer affordable housing to other Canadians who need it most.

For housing projects that may face financial difficulties when subsidies end, CMHC has been actively working to help them prepare for the end of their operating agreements. It is important to remember that provinces and territories can opt to use funds from the investment in affordable housing to support projects after their operating agreements have matured.

• (1830)

Mr. Mike Sullivan: Mr. Speaker, it is quite typical of the government to claim credit for stuff that does not belong to it. The \$1.7 billion that is currently in the co-op and other long-term agreements predated the current government. The almost \$2 billion a year it has taken credit for over the last eight years was actually money Jack Layton negotiated with Paul Martin to have put into the budget, and the Conservatives voted against it. It is all very specious.

The fact of the matter is that there are 90,000 families in Toronto that are on a waiting list for affordable housing. Those 90,000 have not received a single nickel of this federal money and are not likely to, because there is not going to be enough building. At the rate we are building, which is about 5,000 units a year, it will take another 20 years before there is enough built to actually house those 90,000 families, and that is way too long to wait.

We need to act now. We need to take the money that maybe some of those long-term agreements do not need and reinvest it in building affordable housing for Canadians who need it.

Mr. Scott Armstrong: Mr. Speaker, we do agree on that. When the mortgages end and no longer need to be paid and they are operationally sufficient, we can take some of that money and use it for other projects, for some of the 90,000 people that the member opposite talked about who need housing.

I would like to remind the member that our government has invested heavily in housing, providing over \$16.5 billion since 2006. This helps low-income families, seniors, people with disabilities, people in aboriginal communities, and other vulnerable groups across the country. Economic action plan 2014 confirmed that we will continue to work with the provincial and territorial levels of government, municipalities, and other stakeholders, to ensure the accessibility and sustainability of housing, including social housing for those who are most in need.

Our government is investing in those Canadians who need it most through our investment in affordable housing. This will provide federal funding of \$2 billion from 2011 to 2019. This program alone represents an eight-year funding commitment, and is over and above the ongoing support for existing social housing on and off reserve.

In closing, these investments are producing real results, and our government stands by its record on housing.

• (1835)

THE ENVIRONMENT

Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP): Mr. Speaker, it is my honour to rise this evening in adjournment proceedings to pursue a question that I asked earlier, in September of this year. It deals with the issue of Canada's greenhouse gas records: Are emissions rising, or are they falling?

These adjournment proceedings that give us more time do allow for something of a tutorial. I am going to start by reading my full question, and then the answer that I received. That gives us a framework to explain why I want to come back to this point. It is important, and I want to make it very clear that I believe that all members of this place want to get full information and to deal with numbers that are accurate.

I will paraphrase slightly what I asked initially. I said that in an answer in question period, before I asked my question on September 22, I heard the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of the Environment, a good friend whom I see is in the House tonight, say that greenhouse gas levels are falling. Then he said that it has led to a significant reduction in greenhouse gas levels. I said the following:

If the PMO had consulted the Environment Canada website, it would know that neither of those statements is correct. Greenhouse gas levels have been rising steadily since the end of the recession and are slated to end at 734 megatonnes by 2020, less than one half of one percent below the 2005 levels, when the Prime Minister committed to 17%.

I asked the parliamentary secretary to find out if the Prime Minister's Office would check Environment Canada's website before writing the talking points to be used by Conservative parliamentary secretaries and ministers.

Adjournment Proceedings

My hon. colleague, the parliamentary secretary, said:

Since 2005, Canadian greenhouse gas emissions have decreased 5.1%, while the economy has grown by 10.6%.

Here is what I want to put to him. Both statements are correct. One is an attempt to explain, and one is an attempt to confuse. I believe that my statement was the one to explain, and the talking points from the Prime Minister's Office were designed to confuse.

Therefore, let me explain. Greenhouse gas levels in Canada fell to a low point during the recession. After the recession, in 2009, greenhouse gas levels fell below 700 megatonnes to 692 megatonnes. That is the lowest that they had been in some time. What happened was that as soon as the recession was over, greenhouse gas levels started rising. They have been rising ever since 2009. When I hear hon. colleagues say that they are falling, that is a statement that would lead Canadians to believe that they are currently falling.

In terms of the actions of the Conservative administration, I do not believe that the Prime Minister wants to take personal credit for the economic meltdown of 2008, nor do I believe that he had any responsibility for it. However, that is the reason that greenhouse gas levels went as low as they did in 2009. Ever since then, as the economy has recovered, greenhouse gas levels have been steadily rising. They are slated to go, from around 692 megatonnes, in 2009, as I said, to 734 megatonnes by 2020. That means that we will completely blow the so-called Copenhagen target.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Colin Carrie (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of the Environment, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our government's record is clear: we have taken decisive action on the environment while maintaining a strong economy.

[*English*]

Through our sector-by-sector regulatory approach, we have already taken action on some of Canada's largest sources of greenhouse gas emissions, including the coal-fired electricity and transportation sectors.

As a result of regulatory measures, Canada became the first major coal user to ban the construction of traditional coal-fired electricity generation units. Canada already has one of the cleanest electricity systems in the world, with more than three-quarters of electricity in Canada being generated from non-greenhouse gas emitting sources, such as hydro, nuclear, and renewables.

With the stringent new regulations, Canada's system will be even cleaner. Emissions in the electricity sector are expected to fall by 46% by 2030 compared to 2005 levels.

● (1840)

[*Translation*]

As far as the transportation sector is concerned, in September our government announced that it is implementing additional initiatives to cut air pollution and reduce greenhouse gas emissions from cars and trucks. These measures will allow us to further reduce greenhouse gas emissions and clean the air for Canadians.

Thanks to the government's measures in the transportation sector, passenger vehicles and vans built and sold in 2025 will emit roughly

half the greenhouse gas emissions of 2008 models, and emissions from heavy vehicles will be reduced by up to 23% in 2018 models.

[*English*]

Our government is also taking action on climate change in other areas. Last month we announced that Canada will move forward to regulate hydrofluorocarbons, or HFCs, which are potent greenhouse gases. Canada will be aligning these new regulations with regulations proposed by the United States. In doing so, we will be taking pre-emptive steps to reduce the harmful HFC emissions.

Our approach to climate change protects the environment and supports economic prosperity. Indeed, Canada's greenhouse gas emissions have been falling and the economy has been expanding. As reported in Canada's national inventory report, between 2005 and 2012, total Canadian greenhouse gas emissions decreased by 5.1%, while the economy grew by 10.6%.

More recently, emissions have remained steady since 2010, while Canada has seen economic growth of 4.4% over the same period. Furthermore, Canada's per capita emissions are now at their lowest point since fracking began in 1990.

Our government is working to ensure that we achieve results for Canadians and the environment. Our approach will lead to real emissions reductions, maintain Canada's economic competitiveness, and support job creation opportunities for Canadians.

Ms. Elizabeth May: Mr. Speaker, I do not know where to begin, because now we have heard it again. The hon. parliamentary secretary says that greenhouse gas levels have been falling when the opposite is the case.

Ever since the economic recovery began after the 2008 meltdown, greenhouse gas levels in this country have been rising. That is clear on any chart or graph that one examines on the Environment Canada website. These levels are on their way up, not down, and throwing in per capita measures is merely a shell game. The population of Canada is larger, so per person one can say that our emissions are lower, but the reality is that per capita we are one of the world's biggest greenhouse gas emitters. That is nothing to be proud of.

It is time to stop the Enron accounting. It is time to pay attention to the warning of scientists. We need a comprehensive plan that tracks Canada's emissions in order to reduce them substantially before mid-century, to leave a lot of hydrocarbons in the ground, as required by science, and ensure that our children have a livable world before it is too late.

Mr. Colin Carrie: Mr. Speaker, climate change is a significant challenge facing all countries, and Canada is doing its part to address this challenge.

Adjournment Proceedings

As a result of collective action by Canadian governments, consumers, and businesses, Canada's 2020 greenhouse gas emissions are projected to be about 130 megatonnes lower relative to a scenario of no action having been taken since 2005.

We recognize that more work is needed to lower greenhouse gas emissions. Federal initiatives, along with further provincial measures, will contribute to additional emissions reductions.

[*Translation*]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bruce Stanton): The motion to adjourn the House is now deemed to have been adopted. Accordingly, this House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 2 p.m., pursuant to Standing Order 24(1).

(The House adjourned at 6:44 p.m.)

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