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OFFICIAL REPORT
(HANSARD)

Thursday, November 24, 2016

—

Speaker: The Honourable Geoff Regan

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HOUSE OF COMMONS

Thursday, November 24, 2016

The House met at 10 a.m.

Prayer

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

● (1005)

[*English*]

CANADA ELECTIONS ACT

Hon. Maryam Monsef (Minister of Democratic Institutions, Lib.) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-33, An Act to amend the Canada Elections Act and to make consequential amendments to other Acts.

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

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COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

FINANCE

Hon. Wayne Easter (Malpeque, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the seventh report of the Standing Committee on Finance in relation to Bill C-26, an act to amend the Canada Pension Plan, the Canada Pension Plan Investment Board Act and the Income Tax Act.

The committee has studied the bill and has decided to report the bill back to the House without amendment.

* * *

[*Translation*]

RAILWAY SAFETY ACT

Ms. Hélène Lavergère (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, NDP) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-322, An Act to amend the Railway Safety Act (road crossings).

She said: Mr. Speaker, I am very happy and very proud to introduce this bill this morning. It will give the Minister of Transport the power to save lives.

In cities like Montreal, railways go right through densely populated neighbourhoods. They impede pedestrians and cyclists, among others. When people do not really have a safe way to cross the tracks, they do so unsafely. Let us not wait for an accident to happen. There are places where, some mornings, up to 500 people cross railroad tracks unsafely.

When we asked the Minister of Transport about this, he told us that, unfortunately, he could not do anything because the law does not authorize him to require the construction of road crossings. It only allows him to have them removed. I am very pleased to help the Minister of Transport by introducing this bill, which will enable him to order the construction of road crossings that will keep people safe and alive.

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

* * *

[*English*]

PETITIONS

FALUN GONG

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased today to table a petition drawing attention to the abuse of Falun Gong practitioners taking place in the People's Republic of China.

The petitioners draw the attention of members of the House to this situation, and ask the House to pass a resolution to establish measures to stop the Chinese Communist regime's crime of systematically murdering Falun Gong practitioners for their organs, as well as to amend Canadian legislation to combat forced organ harvesting. The petitioners call on the House to publicly call for an end to the persecution of Falun Gong in China.

This, of course, is one of many spiritual or faith-based groups that face significant persecution in China, including Uighur Muslims, Christians, and many other different communities. I commend this to the consideration of the House.

● (1010)

DEMOCRATIC REFORM

Ms. Georgina Jolibois (Desnethé—Missinippi—Churchill River, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am happy to stand in the House today to present this petition on behalf of my constituents.

The petitioners call upon the government to amend the Canada Elections Act to introduce a suitable form of proportional representation after all the public consultations are conducted. Fair voting systems better reflect the will of voters. Let them vote for the candidate or party they prefer, and give each community fair and accountable representation.

Government Orders

PALLIATIVE CARE

Ms. Karina Gould (Burlington, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am honoured to rise in the House today to present a petition requesting the government to consider palliative care.

Residents in my community have asked that the government consider putting palliative care as a defined medical service under the Canada Health Act. They request the House of Commons and Parliament to specifically identify hospice palliative care as a defined medical service covered under the Canada Health Act, so that provincial and territorial governments will be entitled to funds under the Canada health transfer system to provide accessible and available hospice palliative care, for all residents of Canada, in their respective provinces and territories.

TRANS-PACIFIC PARTNERSHIP

Ms. Irene Mathyssen (London—Fanshawe, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have a petition to present today from a number of Londoners who are very concerned about the trans-Pacific partnership.

The petitioners believe this agreement would threaten to reduce access to medicines by restricting the production and sale of generic medicines. They also believe it would reduce the ability of competitors to enter the marketplace, thereby making medical production monopolies. The biologics portion of the agreement states that pharmaceutical products containing biological ingredients will have market protection for a period of at least eight years, thereby making them very expensive and inaccessible.

* * *

QUESTIONS ON THE ORDER PAPER

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would ask that all questions be allowed to stand.

The Speaker: Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[English]

ROUGE NATIONAL URBAN PARK ACT

Hon. Catherine McKenna (Minister of Environment and Climate Change, Lib.) moved that Bill C-18, An Act to amend the Rouge National Urban Park Act, the Parks Canada Agency Act and the Canada National Parks Act, be read the second time and referred to a committee.

She said: Mr. Speaker, the government is taking important steps to amend the Rouge National Urban Park Act, the Parks Canada Agency Act, and the Canada National Parks Act. This demonstrates our commitment to preserving our national parks, and enhancing Canada's first national urban park.

Parks Canada protects and preserves national parks because they tell stories of who we are, including the history, cultures, and contributions of indigenous peoples.

[Translation]

Rouge National Urban Park has been included in the newest category of protected areas within the Parks Canada family, alongside national parks, national historic sites, and national marine conservation areas.

As a large-scale, federally designated protected area with its own legislation, this new national urban park celebrates the Rouge's natural and cultural landscapes, its vibrant farming community, and the traditional use of this special place by indigenous people.

The park offers opportunities for Canadians to engage with it through events, educational programming, and involvement in ecological restoration projects. Parks Canada programs and services at Rouge Park will enable more Canadians, including young Canadians and newcomers to Canada, to experience the outdoors and learn about our history.

[English]

Rouge National Urban Park has been included within the Parks Canada family of protected areas, alongside national parks, national historic sites, and national marine conservation areas. As a large-scale federally designated protected area with its own legislation, this new national urban park celebrates the Rouge's natural and cultural landscapes, its vibrant farming community, and indigenous peoples' traditional use of the space. The park offers opportunities for Canadians to connect with the park through events, educational programming, and involvement in ecological restoration projects. Parks Canada programs and services at the Rouge will allow more Canadians, including young Canadians and newcomers to Canada, to experience the outdoors and learn about our history.

The creation of the park and the protection of its natural, cultural, and agricultural resources are the result of hard work, dedication, and collaboration. The park would not be here if not for the work of the local community, conservation groups, non-governmental organizations, three levels of government—municipal, provincial, and federal—and indigenous communities.

Parks Canada is committed to developing a system of national heritage places that recognizes the role of indigenous peoples in Canada. Recently I was in the greater Toronto area, where I had the honour of meeting with Chief Stacey Laforme of the Mississaugas of the New Credit First Nation. I was very pleased that Chief Laforme expressed his support for the creation of Rouge National Urban Park. Chief Laforme and the Mississaugas of the New Credit, along with nine other first nations, have been working closely with Parks Canada since 2011, when Parks Canada formed a 10-member first nations advisory circle to help guide the creation of the park. This important relationship, based on a culture of respect and appreciation, has helped shape the park's vision and direction, and has led the way to an ongoing collaboration that celebrates over 10,000 years of indigenous peoples' history and culture in Rouge National Urban Park.

Government Orders

●(1015)

[*Translation*]

Along with its important ecosystems and farming communities, the park will also protect significant indigenous sites such as Bead Hill National Historic Site and the Carrying Place Trail National Historic Event. This is but one example of a collaboration that has enabled the Government of Canada to realize the vision of a federally protected area, managed by Parks Canada, in a major urban centre.

Rouge Park is Canada's premiere "learn-to" park.

[*English*]

It is a gateway to discovering nature for 20% of Canada's population. It provides unprecedented opportunities for Canadians to experience nature and learn about our cultural and agricultural heritage. It is a place to gather and recreate, and a place to enhance the lives of urban residents through access to nature. New Canadians and young urban families may not know the joy of canoeing, roasting marshmallows, or taking a hike through the woods to learn about local plants and animals. Rouge National Urban Park is a place to have amazing experiences and build memories.

The proposed amendments would strengthen the Rouge National Urban Park Act and allow the Government of Canada to complete Rouge National Urban Park. Our government made a commitment to Canadians that we would work with the Ontario government to enhance the country's first urban national park. This includes improved legislation to protect this important ecosystem and guide how the park will be managed.

[*Translation*]

One of the proposed amendments to the Rouge National Urban Park Act will ensure that when it comes to managing the park, ecological integrity is the first priority.

The proposed definition of ecological integrity is the same definition used in the Canada National Parks Act, and will be specifically added to the act.

[*English*]

"Ecological integrity" means that ecosystems have integrity when their native components, including wildlife, native plants, waters, and ecological processes, are intact. Over the last year, Parks Canada has worked in partnership to complete 15 ecological restoration, farmland enhancement, and scientific research projects in the park. Ecological integrity will be applied in a unique context to the parks, in a way that respects the reasons the parks were created: to protect nature, culture, and agriculture in an integrated way.

Parks Canada is a recognized world leader in conservation. Through its conservation and restoration program, Parks Canada takes actions to preserve national parks and contribute to the recovery of species at risk.

●(1020)

[*Translation*]

Last winter I visited the Toronto Zoo to learn about a very interesting project. At the zoo they were restoring Blanding's turtles, a species-at-risk, to Rouge National Urban Park. In partnership with

the zoo, Parks Canada is helping to re-establish a healthy, local population of this threatened species. It was inspirational to meet the team working hard to ensure this species has a future.

Like the incredible nature and indigenous stories, agriculture is also tied to the history of the Rouge.

[*English*]

Not far from Toronto city centre, we find class 1 soil, some of the rarest and most fertile farmland in Canada. Working farms are protected in Rouge National Urban Park, and this is unique in a system of federally protected areas. This provides an engaging opportunity to share information with visitors about the important role our farmers play both in food production for the greater Toronto area and as stewards of the environment.

The proposed amendment to the Rouge National Urban Park Act clarifies that ecological integrity will not prevent the carrying out of agricultural activities.

[*Translation*]

These amendments address the requirements of the Province of Ontario, while providing greater certainty to park farmers who will be able to continue carrying out agricultural activities within the park and with leases of up to 30 years. This will provide long-term stability for park farmers and their families, some of whom have been farming in the Rouge Valley since 1799. Farmers can continue carrying out agricultural activities within the park. They provide an important source of locally grown food to the Greater Toronto Area.

[*English*]

The final amendment to the Rouge National Urban Park Act would see 17.1 square kilometres added to the act's schedule. Located in the northern part of the park, this land is part of the first block of land transferred from Transport Canada to Rouge National Urban Park in 2015. This is a small but vital change to the act, as we are seeing parcels of land previously transferred to Parks Canada now officially becoming part of Rouge National Urban Park. This unique park, located within one hour's drive of seven million Canadians, will give people the opportunity to connect with and enjoy nature where they live, learn, work, and play.

[*Translation*]

By encouraging Canadians to visit our national treasures, like the Rouge, and providing them with the information and means to enjoy them, Parks Canada allows more Canadians, including young Canadians and newcomers to Canada, to experience the outdoors and learn about our environment and history.

By building these connections, we can create a community of stewards, people who know and care about these irreplaceable treasures.

Government Orders

● (1025)

[English]

I would like to thank the municipalities and community residents that surround Rouge National Urban Park for their enduring and passionate support for its creation.

Through the amendments to the Rouge National Urban Park Act, our government is following on its commitment to enhance the Rouge National Urban Park and protect its important ecosystems and heritage. We are taking steps to strengthen ecological protections for the Rouge, while continuing to respect and promote a vibrant farming community within the park.

We are confident that this will lead to the timely transfer of lands from the Province of Ontario and the Toronto and Region Conservation Authority. These amendments pave the way for the completion of Canada's very first national urban park.

[Translation]

Canada's national parks protect Canada's diverse ecosystems, maintaining or restoring the ecological integrity of these places for present and future generations. They also provide opportunities for public understanding, appreciation, and enjoyment of the natural world.

Indigenous peoples, local communities, provincial and territorial governments, and the Canadian public expect the government to preserve Canada's natural heritage, and Parks Canada is mandated to protect and present these special places on behalf of all Canadians.

The government is committed to completing the national park system, which was first developed in the 1970s, and the national marine conservation area system, which followed in 1986. These systems support the protection of representative examples of Canada's diverse terrestrial and marine environments.

[English]

The new parks and historic sites account is one tool the government uses in the development of national parks and national marine conservation areas. This account was established as a specified purpose, a non-lapsing account funded from appropriations, the sale of property and immovable assets, and from donations made by the public.

In order to deliver on the government's commitments to preserve and expand the system of protected areas and protect the commemorative integrity of historic sites, the proposed amendments to the Parks Canada Agency Act would allow the new parks and historic sites account to be used in a broader manner.

Currently, the act restricts the use of the account to national parks and protected areas that are not yet fully operational. The proposed amendment would allow the government to use the account and the public to donate funds to expand or complete Canada's protected natural and cultural heritage areas that have attained full operational status. This includes national parks, national marine conservation areas, and national historic sites, as well as other protected heritage areas, including Rouge National Urban Park.

[Translation]

This is important because without the ability to act quickly, the government could lose the opportunity to acquire significant representative areas and heritage assets that may not be on the market again for several generations. The proposed amendment would provide Parks Canada with the flexibility to be nimble in purchasing land and cultural and historical assets as soon as they come on the market.

Parks Canada manages one of the finest and most extensive systems of protected natural and cultural heritage areas in the world. This measure would support the government's commitment to develop Canada's world-class network of heritage areas.

It would, for example, make the new parks and historic sites account available for parks that are fully operational such as Bruce Peninsula and Grasslands national parks. These and other parks are missing pieces of land from the final boundaries originally envisioned when the parks were established. However, as they are already fully operational, land purchases to complete the parks cannot be made through the account. The proposed amendment would address this gap in the legislation.

● (1030)

[English]

This bill would also amend the Canada National Parks Act to modify the boundary of Wood Buffalo National Park in order to create the Garden River Indian Reserve and contribute to Canada's reconciliation with indigenous peoples. By using lands from Wood Buffalo National Park to create the Garden River Indian Reserve, the Government of Canada would be honouring its commitment to the Little Red River Cree Nation. The creation of the Garden River Indian Reserve would build on the government's commitments to reconciliation and nation-to-nation relationships with indigenous peoples based on a recognition of the rights, respect, co-operation, and partnership.

These amendments to the Rouge National Urban Park Act, the Parks Canada Agency Act, and the Canada National Parks Act are important and positive steps to strengthen the legislative framework that protects one of the finest and most extensive systems of protected natural and cultural areas in the world. Parks Canada places belong to all Canadians. National parks, historic sites, national marine conservation areas, and the Rouge National Urban Park simply represent the very best that Canada has to offer and their important ecosystems and heritage must be protected.

Ms. Linda Duncan (Edmonton Strathcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the minister for bringing forward these amendments, for which I know there is a lot of support. The Rouge National Urban Park was created a year back, but people were concerned that its ecological integrity was not protected, so it is very important that this be added.

Government Orders

I am very concerned about another provision of this bill that the minister skirted over, and that is the removal of almost 40 square kilometres from Wood Buffalo National Park. I spoke last evening with representatives of the Mikisew Cree, who were stunned to hear of this. They said that they did not believe they were consulted at all. The Mikisew Cree brought in UNESCO to do an investigation of their concern with the failure of the federal government to protect Wood Buffalo National Park.

My question to the minister is this. Is the minister planning to reach out, as she said she did on the Rouge, and consult with the first nations who are concerned about these impending impacts to Wood Buffalo and is she giving consideration to adding additional lands elsewhere, finally putting the resources in to protect Wood Buffalo National Park?

Hon. Catherine McKenna: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the member opposite for her support in protecting the ecological integrity of the Rouge National Urban Park.

With respect to her question about the Garden River excision from Wood Buffalo National Park, the proposed amendments would excise a small portion of land, just over 37 kilometres, to facilitate the creation of the Garden River Indian Reserve. The Government of Canada and the Little Red River Cree Nation underwent a series of negotiations to achieve consensus on the terms and conditions for the area to be excised from the park boundary.

In bringing forward this amendment, the Government of Canada is honouring its commitment to the Little Red River Cree Nation. The creation of the Garden River Indian Reserve is consistent with the government's mandate commitment to reconciliation and nation-to-nation relationship with indigenous peoples based on recognition of rights, respect, co-operation, and partnership. I am certainly committed to working with the Wood Buffalo community to ensure that we move forward in a positive way.

• (1035)

Hon. Kevin Sorenson (Battle River—Crowfoot, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the minister for coming to speak on this important topic, which actually our Conservative government began. I commend her for bringing this forward again.

More and more we see urban creep taking a lot of prime farm land. I come from a rural riding, where we understand that they are not making any more dirt. They are not making any more farm land, or very little.

Although the minister may say that agricultural practices are protected and will be protected in the bill, is it going to be strong enough so that years down the road, as environmentalists come forward and view the agricultural practices that are taking place within this park, they will be protected? Can the minister make the commitment that those agricultural practices, those farmers, are not going to be displaced years down the road when the policies of a provincial or federal government may change?

Hon. Catherine McKenna: Mr. Speaker, we are very pleased that we were able to do what the party opposite was not able to do, which was work with farmers, environmentalists, and the Government of Ontario to ensure that this land was transferred. Unfortunately, the previous government was not able to do that, because it would not recognize the ecological integrity of the land.

I met with the farmers in Rouge National Urban Park a number of times. As the member opposite may not know, they were living with leases from year to year. I was very pleased to come to an arrangement with them. I worked very hard to understand their concerns as well as the concerns of the Ontario government and members of the broader community so that we could find a way forward.

We are committed to protecting the ecological integrity of the park but also to making sure that farmers have the ability to operate in the park. I think it is extremely important that all Canadians see the value of our farmers and that they also see working farms and how food is produced. That is why we were able to come to this arrangement, which will provide security for the farmers with 30-year leases.

Mr. Wayne Stetski (Kootenay—Columbia, NDP): Mr. Speaker, we are pleased to see the bill moving forward for Rouge National Urban Park, but I have some concerns.

When we look across the country, in Gros Morne, for example, the recommendation has been that it needs a buffer zone around the park to protect its ecological integrity long term. Wood Buffalo is currently being investigated by UNESCO. We are waiting for the report to be released any day. There are concerns about the Site C dam in British Columbia and the impact on water and wetlands around Wood Buffalo. In Jasper, we had a \$69-million bicycle trail appear out of nowhere in the budget for next year.

Moving forward, how do the government and the minister plan to protect the ecological integrity of this important park?

Hon. Catherine McKenna: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the member opposite for all the work he does when it comes to protecting the ecological integrity of our parks.

We take this very seriously. That is why we were able to get an arrangement whereby the first order is protecting the ecological integrity of Rouge National Urban Park. We brought together unlikely suspects. We brought together environmentalists with farmers, with community members, and with different orders of government so that we could come to an arrangement whereby we will be protecting the ecological integrity of the park.

We will be moving forward with the land management arrangement and will provide more details about how we will do just that.

• (1040)

Mr. Mel Arnold (North Okanagan—Shuswap, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have one question, to begin with, to clarify the reference to the Grasslands National Park.

I would ask the minister if she is referring to an area in south Okanagan, which they have been trying to convert into a national park. They have been referring to it as grasslands national park, even though it has not been designated a park area. It has traditionally been used by the cattle ranchers for grazing. The locals use it for hunting, berry-picking, and so on. However, there is pressure to include this area as a national park and exclude those uses.

Was the minister referring to the grasslands area in the south Okanagan when she referred to Grasslands National Park?

Government Orders

Hon. Catherine McKenna: Mr. Speaker, I was referring to Grasslands National Park.

Mr. Gary Anandasangaree (Scarborough—Rouge Park, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is indeed a proud day for me, as the member for Scarborough—Rouge Park, and certainly for my colleagues from Scarborough and the surrounding regions that represent the park. I have been speaking to many members of the community and many different stakeholders, and everyone is commending the minister for moving so fast on this issue.

One of the major concerns we had was ecological integrity. I know now that the provincial government is quite content to transfer its portion of the land.

One thing I want to pick up on with respect to the minister's statement is heritage. This is a very important legacy we are leaving to our young people. How does this fit in with our Canada 150 objectives? How do we celebrate this park on such an important occasion?

Hon. Catherine McKenna: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the member for all his hard work on Rouge National Urban Park. He has been a great champion of this, and I am very pleased that we were able to work together, building on the work of the previous government.

It is very exciting that we are able to announce this leading up to Canada's 150th birthday. Our priorities for Canada's 150th are highlighting the role of youth, highlighting the role of indigenous peoples in our history, and celebrating our heritage. This is going to be a great opportunity. This national urban park is within a one-hour drive, and is accessible by public transit, for seven million Canadians, 20% of our population. This is very exciting, and we certainly will look for all opportunities to celebrate with all Canadians. I hope all members in the House will join us in doing just that.

Hon. Peter Kent (Thornhill, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is both a delight and a disappointment to join this debate on Bill C-18 today. It is a delight because it offers a wonderful opportunity to celebrate again the magnificent accomplishments of Parks Canada and the agency's pioneering protection and innovative conservation of precious Canadian spaces for the past 125 years. It is a disappointment because the amending legislation before us contains a sad and unacceptable compromise of Parks Canada's conservation principles and practices, a compromise clearly intended by the Liberal government to provide federal political cover for the petty partisan obstructionism of the Ontario Liberal government in its refusal to transfer provincial lands to our Conservative government to complete the magnificent new Rouge National Urban Park.

I will speak first to my delight. It was an honour to serve in a government that, in barely 10 years, increased Canada's protected areas by almost 60%, with new national parks, new national park reserves, and marine protected areas. Many of these additions involved remote wilderness areas, such as Nahanni, Nááts'ihch'oh, and Sable Island, similar to Canada's original wilderness mountain park, Banff National Park.

Then, building on a decades-old dream of a broad range of passionate and dedicated conservation-minded citizens, community groups, and far-sighted local, provincial, and federal politicians,

came Canada's first urban national park, not quite in the centre but certainly surrounded by the Canadian metropolis, the greater Toronto area.

In the 2011 Speech from the Throne and the 2012 budget, our Conservative government announced a commitment to work for the creation of a new national park in the Rouge Valley, and \$143.7 million were assigned to a ten-year plan to create the park, with a provision for \$7.6 million per year thereafter for continuing operations. Parks Canada's unparalleled expertise and creative talents were brought to bear to meet the challenge of developing and delivering this entirely new concept. The challenges were considerable, unlike anything in Parks Canada's history.

The Rouge Valley, from the shores of Lake Ontario to the Oak Ridges moraine more than 20 kilometres to the north, is a once-pristine natural area that has witnessed more than a century of intense human activity. There are ancient first nations sites but also a former landfill site and an auto wrecker's yard. Surrounded by residential communities and businesses, the Rouge is criss-crossed by hydro transmission lines, railway lines, highways and secondary roads, and waste-water sewers. In the north, there are 7,500 acres of class 1 farmland worked by 700 farmers, who were uncertain of their future for decades, on lands expropriated more than 40 years ago by a Liberal government for an airport that was never built.

Despite all these realities, so unlike Canada's traditional wilderness parks, the Rouge is still home to marvellous biodiversity: rivers and streams, marshes, a Carolinian ecosystem, and evidence of some of this country's oldest indigenous sites, human history dating back more than 10,000 years.

When the Rouge National Urban Park is completed, it will provide exceptional protection for all of the Rouge's approximately 1,700 species of plants, animals, and marine life. This includes full, uncompromised protection for all of the valley's threatened and endangered species. Unlike past well-intended but unfulfilled plans for the Rouge, species recovery plans will be mandatory and non-negotiable and under the strongest protection of Canada's Species at Risk Act.

Rouge National Urban Park will provide, for the first time in its history, year-round, dedicated law enforcement through Parks Canada's storied park wardens. As with other of our national parks, they will have full powers to enforce a single set of park rules and regulations.

The uncertainty experienced for so long by farmers in the Rouge created by short-term one-year land leases will be eliminated. Farmers will have access to long leases. With that predictability, they will be able to invest in repairs to farm infrastructure. They will be able to apply best farming practices and continue to both contribute to the local economy and provide an enduring and productive farming presence in this rich portion of the Rouge for visitors from far and near to see.

Government Orders

•(1045)

That brings me to the delightful importance of the Rouge National Urban Park's accessibility. It is located amidst fully 20% of Canada's population. While it takes many hours and many thousands of dollars to reach some of our traditional national parks, the wonders of the Rouge are easily and inexpensively accessible by road, rail, and public transit. Visitor information centres, guided hikes, and kayak touring are available to schoolchildren and to Canadians, old and new.

Parks Canada's carefully developed plan for Canada's first urban park is exactly what conservationists and the Rouge Park alliance, the former provincially appointed managing authority of the lands, have requested for decades. That plan was the result of consultations with 150 stakeholder groups and 11,000 Canadians, and had the endorsement of all the municipal and regional governments that have committed lands to the Rouge National Urban Park.

However, there was one notable foot-dragging exception. That was the Liberal Government of Ontario. That government, through successive infrastructure ministers—not parks ministers—refused to allow conservation experts at the Ontario Parks agency to evaluate and respond to the Parks Canada plan. At one point, one infrastructure minister even demanded of me what was effectively a ransom. These were lands, incidentally, that the province had been neglecting and trying to get rid of for years. He said they would transfer the provincial lands for the payment of \$100 million. Of course, our government refused to pay, considered the demand a bit of temporary madness by a cash-short, badly managed government. Then as our federal legislation to create the Rouge National Urban Park, Bill C-40, approached passage into law, a successor Ontario infrastructure minister took another tack. The provincial Liberals claimed Parks Canada's carefully crafted plan and legislation was inadequate. It was not good enough for Ontario.

I will get to that fabricated untruth in a moment. First, allow me to transition from my delight in participating in this debate to my disappointment with the legislation before us in Bill C-18.

Bill C-18 would amend legislation containing the sort of agency housekeeping that Parks Canada performs every year or so. Two of the amendments, as we have already heard today, are fairly routine. They would mean a slight change in the boundaries of Wood Buffalo National Park and changes in the Parks Canada Agency Act regarding property considerations and compensation in protected areas. However, the main amendment is an insult to Parks Canada's well-deserved international reputation. As I said at the outset, it is a sad and unacceptable compromise of Parks Canada's conservation principles and practices.

The Liberal government would add to the Rouge National Urban Park Act the condition that it be enforced under the principle of ecological integrity. Ecological integrity does not have a universal definition, but Parks Canada has long considered it applicable only to our wilderness parks, largely untouched by civilization. For example, in Banff National Park, where barely 4% of its territory has been disrupted by the Trans-Canada Highway, town sites, and ski hills, ecological integrity means that forest fires or floods are allowed to occur naturally, except where communities or human life may be threatened. A succession of conservationists spoke to this term

during House and Senate committee consideration of Bill C-40. A strong majority rejected ecological integrity as an appropriate guiding principle for the Rouge National Urban Park.

For example, Mr. Larry Noonan, from the Altona Forest 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...".

•(1050)

Mr. Noonan continued, saying, "Ecological integrity cannot be applied to an urban national park." He picked his words carefully, and with his usual calm authority said:

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.

I will turn now to the thoughts of Alan Latourelle, Parks Canada's CEO for 13 years, from 2002 until his retirement just last August after 32 years of distinguished service to Canadians. Alan was responsible for the Rouge-enabling legislation. He wrote a powerful farewell message last August that was originally posted on the Environment Canada website. It has since been removed. I wonder why. However, I think this House might reflect on a few of his thoughts in that letter, because I believe it clearly defends the original Rouge National Urban Park legislation and says that the consideration of ecological integrity is inappropriate and unacceptable.

Mr. Latourelle said:

...I feel compelled to set the record straight with respect to this important initiative.

As you may be aware, some environmental non-governmental organizations (ENGOS) have made several negative and incorrect statements concerning Parks Canada and our commitments under the federal provincial agreement to establish Rouge National Urban Park.

Alan continued, referring to the then and still now conditions in the provincially controlled lands. He stated:

There is currently no...specific provincial legislation governing the day-to-day management of the regional park. As a result, aggregate mineral extraction, destruction of species at risk habitat and limitless reduction of park lands for transportation purposes are not currently legally prohibited, and there is no law that ensures that the land mass connecting Lake Ontario to the Oak Ridges Moraine is protected for future generations.

He continued:

In contrast, all lands to be included in the Rouge National Urban Park...will legally preclude all of the inappropriate uses mentioned above and will ensure that the vision of linking Lake Ontario to the Oak Ridges Moraine becomes a reality.

Government Orders

Furthermore, Parks Canada's budget to protect and present this exceptional place is 75 times greater than the operational investment made by the Province [of Ontario] over the past decade and includes a significant conservation budget in the areas of science, dedicated law enforcement and restoration. As a result, for the first time in its history, citizens of the GTA are assured that the Rouge will be protected for future generations and that its trail and visitor facilities will also be brought to a higher standard.

Then Mr. Latourelle drove home a powerful truth when he said:

Any organization that implies that the Rouge National Urban Park Act does not meet current provincial legislation is misleading the public. There is simply no act... passed by the Ontario legislature that places ecological integrity as the first priority on Rouge lands owned by Ontario.

Therefore, while Parks Canada wardens, scientists, and support staff have been working for more than a year and a half on federal lands transfer to Rouge National Urban Park, the provincial Liberal government, by its petty partisan obstructionism of withholding the transfer of provincial lands under false pretenses, has left those provincial lands neglected, unpoliced, unprotected, and subject to speeding, to poaching, and to garbage-dumping.

The federal Liberals, by providing political cover for their provincial cousins, are not only attempting to inappropriately apply ecological integrity but are planting a possible poison seed in the Rouge National Urban Park Act with this term. Recognizing this glaring contradiction in Bill C-18, the government offers an assurance in the bill that ecological integrity would not prevent the carrying out of agricultural activities as provided for in the act.

However, the long-abused farmers are not sure. They are worried. The York Region Federation of Agriculture joins the majority of conservationists, taxpayers, mayors, deputy mayors, and counsellors across the GTA who strongly oppose this amendment, fearing it may one day open the door to improper retrograde changes to the park.

• (1055)

Rouge National Urban Park will eventually be a truly national treasure. It will be at least 13 times the size of Vancouver's Stanley Park, 16 times larger than New York's Central Park, and 33 times larger than London's Hyde Park.

Too much time has been wasted on petty political partisanship, and I urge the minister and her government to reconsider. I urge the minister to remove this regrettable amendment. I urge the minister to encourage the provincial Liberal government to simply transfer the land once and for all, and to complete the Rouge National Urban Park.

I would just like to say as a postscript to my remarks on Bill C-18 that, in July a year ago, former prime minister Harper made a visit to the park and made a commitment to enlarge federal lands already committed to the park, which are recognized again today in this amendment. He made a commitment to add even more of the Pickering expropriated lands, 21 square kilometres, which I hope the government will follow through on eventually, after its consultation-cum-procrastination. I would hope that the Liberal government will follow through on former prime minister Harper's commitment to add 21 square kilometres of expropriated land on the Durham side of the York Durham Line, which once completed and added, would increase Rouge National Urban Park by 36% to 79.5 square kilometres.

At the same time, the former prime minister announced the addition of another almost \$27 million to rehabilitate, manage, and convert these additional farmlands in the Pickering appropriated area to add to the park, to protect this category one farmland in perpetuity. This is in addition to the almost \$144 million committed by our former government to establish the Rouge National Urban Park over 10 years and almost \$7 million for operational costs afterward. It would be made accessible to the farmers to grow crops of their choice to contribute to the local economy and local food consumption. However at the same time it was to make those properties available to urban visitors, many of whom would have never set foot on a farm. As Canada's farmland rapidly diminishes, particularly around the greater Toronto area, these farmers, recognizing the benefit that they would receive in a continuing predictable existence on their farms that have been farmed for many years, would make their lands available. They would allow and encourage visitors to experience the joys and amazement of visits to their various types of farms.

I will leave it there, but I will once again reiterate my closing remarks. I urge the Minister of Environment and Climate Change and her government to reconsider and remove the regrettable amendment imposing ecological integrity on the Rouge National Urban Park; and to encourage the provincial Liberals to simply transfer their lands and, once and for all, complete the Rouge National Urban Park.

• (1100)

Hon. Catherine McKenna (Minister of Environment and Climate Change, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the former environment minister for his comments. I cannot tell from the comments and his excitement for the expansion of the park and accessibility to all these Canadians whether his party will be supporting the bill.

We are very pleased that we are able to work with the Ontario government to ensure the ecological integrity. I want to thank the members of Parliament for Scarborough—Rouge Park and Scarborough—Guildwood for making sure that we kept that foremost in our minds and were able to reach an agreement.

I just want to understand what the former environment minister's concern is about ensuring that ecological integrity, which was set out in the Canada National Parks Act, is built into Rouge National Urban Park. I just want to understand why ecological integrity would not be a priority for the party opposite.

Hon. Peter Kent: Mr. Speaker, replying to the first part of the minister's question, I hope to see in committee study an amendment proposed to remove ecological integrity from Bill C-18 for all of the reasons I have just listed. The principal reason I have said in a number of ways.

Government Orders

I have quoted leading conservationists who have, through the Rouge Park Alliance, dedicated conservationists. These include deputy mayors, mayors and councillors of Toronto, Markham, Vaughan region, York region. They have agreed that ecological integrity, while defined traditionally in terms of our wilderness parks like Banff, Jasper, Nahanni, and Nááts'ihch'oh, and Sable Island, which we added, requires the sensitivity and the willingness to allow nature to take its course, uncontrolled, uncontained, and unrestrained, except where it threatens human populations or infrastructure, like in the case of Banff, Jasper, the Trans-Canada Highway. This is entirely inappropriate in this unique new setting of an urban national park.

In the case of the Rouge National Urban Park, unlike Banff where only 4% of the wilderness area has been disrupted by man, more than 75% was former landfill sites as well as aboriginal heritage sites. A major highway, the major cross-Canada rail line, sewer lines and residential houses literally on the very borders of the park would allow forest fires or floods to continue uncontrolled. This is completely unreasonable, impractical and, in fact, dangerous.

• (1105)

Mr. Wayne Stetski (Kootenay—Columbia, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I very much appreciate the fact that my colleague supports the creation of the park, but I am curious. Under the Conservative government in 2012, \$30 million was cut from Parks Canada's budget. During the tenure of the Conservatives, they cut 33% of the science people associated with Parks Canada. By 2014, there was a \$3 billion infrastructure deficit.

I am curious how the Conservatives would like to see the Liberals move forward to ensure that ecological integrity conservation is protected and the infrastructure is better looked after than it was under their government.

Hon. Peter Kent: Mr. Speaker, for many decades now, Parks Canada has faced an overwhelming infrastructure deficit with regard to our heritage canals and with many of our protected areas, not just the national parks but other protected areas, and that is indeed a challenge. It was a challenge for our government. It will be a challenge for the Liberal government. However, after experiencing the recession of 2009-10, we did take budgetary measures that consolidated some of our costs. We also contemporized some of our hiring practices. Instead of having Parks Canada libraries scattered across the country with artifacts here, there and everywhere, we consolidated those artifacts. That resulted in a regrettable downsizing of staff.

At the same time, we also provided greater access for more Canadians to the parks, with a variety of incentives for the young to draw them to the park to increase revenues. In recent years, attendance at our great national parks, the more popular and traditional parks such as Banff and Jasper had diminished. We were trying to jump-start and reinvigorate an interest in getting people there. The attendance in those parks and the payment of fees enhance the budget and operational capability of Parks Canada to deliver.

As I said in my remarks, we added, in barely 10 years, more than 60% of the area of protected places in Canada, and these include—

The Deputy Speaker: Order, please. I remind the member for Thornhill to keep an eye on the Chair to get some clues. I appreciate

the hon. member wanting to address the member who posed the question. It is certainly natural to do that.

Questions and comments, the hon. member for Scarborough—Rouge Park.

Mr. Gary Anandasangaree (Scarborough—Rouge Park, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, one thing I have done over the past two and a half years is consult with a number of community groups and organizations that have worked on the park for decades. They have not worked on the park for one, two, or five years. Some of these organizations and individuals have been working on this for 30 to 50 years.

I heard over and over again about the essential need for environmental protection and ecological integrity. With the stakeholders I met with, that was unquestionable. In fact, some even said that we had not gone far enough.

I would like to get a sense from my friend as to where the statement came from that we should not protect the ecology as we move forward on what is a really unique project, a first step for Canada, and what we hope will be emulated across the country.

Hon. Peter Kent: Mr. Speaker, my colleague should listen to some of the members of the Rouge Park Alliance. They have worked on this not for five, 10 or 15 years, but 30 and 40 years. Pauline Browes was a former minister responsible for Parks Canada. David Crombie is a former honourable member of the House and a former mayor of Toronto. Alan Wells is a long-time conservationist in the valley. Larry Noonan, whose remarks I cited, was in opposition to ecological integrity in House and Senate committee hearings more than a year ago. I can count on him, along with Alan Latourelle, the former CEO of Parks Canada. They will again attend to present testimony in committee when Bill C-18 is considered.

We are entirely for protection of the environment. We completely reject the political cover that the Liberal government has given to the Ontario government by injecting the term “ecological integrity” improperly and dangerously. It demeans the reputation of Parks Canada simply to provide political cover. The government should stand on its back legs and demand that the province of Ontario fulfill its commitment and transfer those lands now, with none of this—

• (1110)

The Deputy Speaker: We have time for one more short question and response.

The hon. member for Yellowhead.

Mr. Jim Eglinski (Yellowhead, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I was somewhat alarmed when the minister focused on ecological integrity. I am very glad to hear that my comrade has concerns, as I do.

The minister stated that she met with environmentalists. What about the rail, highway, or air corridors through there? All she mentioned was that she met with environmentalists, who would push ecological integrity of that area. The design of that park will be no different than Banff or Jasper, which are now plagued with traffic problems. They have railroads and major highways through them, as well as the air corridor. Adding ecological integrity is going to become a stumbling block for Parks Canada.

Would the member reply to that?

Government Orders

Hon. Peter Kent: Mr. Speaker, that speaks directly to the points the Conservatives are trying to make. This ecological integrity thing is the result of the Ontario government's most recent attempt to block and delay the transfer of lands. The Liberal government at Queen's Park was bragging at the time as it was offering these excuses, saying that it would hold this land back until it could transfer it to another government. It was petty, pure partisan politics.

Mr. Wayne Stetski (Kootenay—Columbia, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is always a privilege to rise in the House to represent my constituents of Kootenay—Columbia. It is an honour as well to be the advocate for national parks for the NDP. I prefer “advocate” to “critic”, as I have spent my life working for parks, and I am very much an advocate for them.

I am also happy to speak to Bill C-18 and the importance of protecting Canada's national parks. The New Democrats have long called for strong legislation that gives Rouge National Urban Park the same legal protection as our other national parks.

Rouge is one of the most biologically diverse areas in all of Canada. It is home to a rare Carolinian forest, more than 23 federally designated species at risk, and more than 1,700 plant and animal species. It also provides the only ecological connection for wildlife between the Oak Ridges Moraine and Lake Ontario. Rouge also has great cultural significance, containing a national historic site, an active agricultural community, and some of Canada's oldest known indigenous historic sites and villages.

For decades, community groups, such as the Friends of the Rouge Watershed, have worked tirelessly with local and provincial governments to protect the existing parklands with effective conservation management plans. It is our hope that all of this work will now result in the creation of a strong Rouge National Urban Park, one that may serve as a model for other parks to come.

While Bill C-18 does make big strides forward in prioritizing ecological integrity, there is still more work to be done. As lawyer John Swaigen of Ecojustice noted, “Notably missing from Bill C-40”, the Conservative's Rouge legislation, “was a commitment to preserve ecological integrity.” He went on to say:

...Also missing from the bill were a commitment to preserve the parkland for future generations, requirements for a strong science-based ecological approach to park management, and requirements for public and scientific consultation to help create and implement the park management plan...Despite this important progress [in Bill C-18], there is still room for improvement — none of the other recommended amendments to the Act have been made.

The New Democrats agree. Additional amendments are required to give the legislation sharper teeth and to ensure that the government's commitment to ecological integrity is more than just words. The New Democrats believe that the legislation for Rouge should ensure that all activities which may affect the park undergo thorough environmental assessments, and that greater opportunity should be mandated for regular public and parliamentary oversights to hold the government accountable to its promises and its stated priorities.

In addition, there has already been a great deal of work done by the Ontario government and local stakeholders on ecological management plans for Rouge. In fact, part of the land transfer agreement between the province and the federal government requires

that the federal legislation for Rouge must meet or exceed the existing provincial legislation protecting the park.

It was the previous Conservative government's failure to meet this requirement with the initial Rouge legislation that caused the provincial government to withdraw its support for the land transfer agreement. The current government, of course, enjoys a greater level of support from the Ontario provincial government, and so the deal is back on the table. However, this does not change the fact that we have a responsibility to ensure that Rouge's guiding legislation meets or exceeds existing levels of protection.

Part of that means ensuring that ecological integrity is prioritized in the legislation, as reflected in Bill C-18, and part of that means incorporating and complementing the excellent science-based work that has gone on before. We want Rouge Park's management plan to be nimble and able to respond to issues identified by ongoing scientific monitoring and planning. However, we also do not need to reinvent the wheel when so much good work has already been done to effectively manage this important ecosystem.

In 2013, Canada's environment commissioner found that important gaps existed in Parks Canada's systems for maintaining and restoring ecological integrity. There is certainly no need to widen these gaps by ignoring the existing ecological management plans.

The environment commissioner's report points to a larger issue facing all of Canada's national parks, and facing Canada's larger conservation plan, in fact. There is a growing concern that the federal government is falling down on its commitments on ecological integrity and on conservation as a whole.

● (1115)

Over the past few months, I have been proud to participate as the NDP representative of the environment committee study on protected areas and conservation objectives. This study has focused on Canada's progress in achieving its conservation targets and how we move forward in the future.

In 2010, the Conservative government signed on to the Aichi biodiversity targets, which commit us to the goal of protecting 17% of our land and 10% of our marine territory by 2020. These are ambitious goals, but a number of countries around the world have already achieved or even exceeded them, including Brazil, the Czech Republic, Costa Rica, Botswana, Austria, Colombia, Spain, and others. By contrast, Canada's progress on these targets to date has been abysmal. We have currently protected only 10% of our land and just 1.1% of our marine areas. With just over three years until 2020, the new Liberal government has committed to meeting these targets, but we have a very long way to go.

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The witnesses who have appeared at the environment committee virtually all agree that the federal government has a major leadership role to play in ensuring that Canada's conservation objectives are met. This includes providing predictable ongoing funding, and a consistent coordination effort across the network of protected areas, including but not limited to Canada's national parks.

As Silvia D'Amelio of Trout Unlimited Canada told us:

There is a strong need for a national strategy—not just an agency one—for the management and identification of future protected areas. This requires collaborative strategic planning and the linking of various protected area initiatives by Environment Canada, Parks Canada, and Fisheries and Oceans Canada into a cohesive integrated planning initiative that would direct a longer-term protection program.

However, so far, this coordination effort has been lacking in Canada.

John Lounds of the Nature Conservancy of Canada said, “the range of federally protected areas is not currently integrated in any formal way to achieve Canada's targets and objectives, and nor are they coordinated with provincial, indigenous, or privately protected areas.”

The lack of true federal leadership when it comes to conservation has left us far behind when we need to meet our objectives. The federal government must turn its promises into considered action in order to make real progress on achieving the Aichi targets.

At the same time, the witnesses at the environment committee told us that while every effort should be made to reach Canada's conservation targets, the government must not prioritize quantity over quality. Instead, conservation science and the protection of biodiversity must be at the centre of policy surrounding protected areas, a greater emphasis needs to be placed on ensuring that conservation and ecological protection is meaningful, and a minimum standard of protection should be put in place for protected areas.

Here, again, the government does not have that great a track record. The environment commissioner told the committee:

In our fall 2013 audit of protected areas for wildlife, we found that Environment Canada had not met its responsibilities for preparing management plans and monitoring the condition of its protected areas.

Only about one quarter of national wildlife areas, and less than one third of migratory bird sanctuaries, were assessed as having adequate or excellent ecological integrity.

In addition, 90% of national wildlife areas did not have adequate management plans, and these plans were more than 20 years old.

Finally, monitoring was done sporadically. The department could not track ecosystem or species changes and address emerging threats.

Alison Woodley of the Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society concurred: “There is an urgent need to refocus Parks Canada on its first priority by law of maintaining and restoring ecological integrity.”

Moving forward, we need a renewed commitment to making conservation about effective ecological protection based on the best science available.

Dr. Stephen Woodley of the International Union for the Conservation of Nature told the committee:

Often people interpret [the Aichi biodiversity] target 11 as being only about achieving 17% on land and 10% on water, and this would be a misinterpretation of

the target. It's also very much about protecting areas of particular importance to biodiversity and ecosystem services to ensure that these areas are effective and equitably managed, that they're ecologically representative, and that they work together as a well-connected system. Those elements are fundamental.

● (1120)

Designating a large chunk of land as a protected area only goes so far. That designation must bring with it a commitment to scientific monitoring, planning, and good policies, based on the protection of that ecosystem. These commitments must also be backed by the resources necessary to effectively implement them, and by the transparency and oversight that hold the government accountable to fulfilling them. Without these things, our protected areas are reduced to lines on a map. This is as important for Rouge National Urban Park as it is for any other protected area in Canada.

Another major theme from the witnesses at environment committee was that conservation can and should be a key component in reconciliation with Canada's indigenous peoples. We heard clearly that the federal government's conservation objectives must involve thorough consultation and collaboration with first nations, and that indigenous rights and traditional knowledge must be respected and embraced.

Bill C-18 includes a modification to the boundary of Wood Buffalo National Park that will withdraw 37 square kilometres from Wood Buffalo to create the Garden River Indian reserve. This measure honours a long-standing commitment to the Little Red River Cree Nation, and is certainly welcome.

However, there remains much to do. When we look at some of the concerns, particularly around Wood Buffalo right now, which is under investigation by UNESCO in terms of whether the park should retain its world heritage site, we know there is a lot more to do to protect our national parks.

I was very heartened, though, during our discussions across western Canada, and Canada as a whole, to learn that first nations were interested in creating more conservation areas. They felt it would help both conservation and reconciliation, assuming that these are done in partnership. As Chief Steven Nitah of the Lutsel K'e Dene First Nation told committee, “Every Canadian has a treaty in this country, whether you are indigenous or non-indigenous. If you live in Algonquin territory, there is a treaty with Algonquins. Therefore, as Canadians, you have to respect and support that treaty, so that this government respects those treaties.”

Our protected areas have an important role to play in fostering nation-to-nation relationships with our indigenous peoples. It is incumbent upon all of us, as parliamentarians, and as Canadians, that we consider the role of conservation in reconciliation as we move forward.

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As we look to the future, it is important to note that a large number of the witnesses in the environment committee's protected areas study told us that the current Aichi targets are just a starting point. They are, after all, political targets, not targets based on conservation science. The witnesses told us that we need to be thinking more "big picture" when we think about conservation planning. We need to think more about connectivity.

Bill C-18 includes a measure that will broaden Parks Canada's ability to pay out funds from the new parks and historic sites account under the Parks Canada Agency Act. This change will provide the government with greater flexibility in paying out funds for the acquisition of land to expand existing national parks, not just to establish new ones. It is our hope that this change will open up possibilities for the government to think on a larger scale when it comes to parks planning.

It is clear that we must expand our scope to think about ecosystems and how protected areas can connect with each other for better ecological outcomes. As Peter Kendall of the Earth Rangers told committee, "Species and habitats don't exist in silos, and neither do the solutions to their protection..."

If we are going to look beyond the current Aichi targets to what makes sense on an ecosystem scale, then we are going to need to broaden our thinking about protected areas, particularly in highly populated regions of the country. Urban national parks may well be a part of that answer.

Rouge National Urban Park provides us with an incredible opportunity to set a bold precedent and solid foundation for the future of urban national parks across Canada. With approximately 20% of Canada's population living within one hour of the park and public transit access, Rouge also provides us with the opportunity to connect a larger number of Canadians with our environment, and to engage them in the important work of preserving and protecting our natural heritage.

As we look ahead to the Aichi biodiversity targets and beyond, the development of urban national parks may have an important role to play. It is therefore essential that we commit to making effective conservation a true priority for Rouge Park, and for all of our national parks.

• (1125)

Bill C-18 would make some important strides forward by bringing the legislation governing Rouge National Urban Park in line with that of Canada's other national parks. For that reason, it has earned the well-deserved support of a broad group of stakeholders. At the same time, there is more to do to ensure that the language about ecological integrity is backed by scientific monitoring and public oversight and accountability.

The NDP will be supporting this bill at second reading with the hope of strengthening it at the committee level, so that Rouge National Urban Park can set a solid precedent for urban national parks moving forward, and so that we, as parliamentarians, can live up to our obligation to protect Canada's natural heritage for generations to come.

Hon. John McKay (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member probably

was not here for the previous iteration of this bill, and therefore would not know that the issue of ecological integrity was a hot one. I want to read into the record the definition of ecological integrity, and then, if I may, ask the member a question on it.

ecological integrity means, with respect to a park, a condition that is determined to be characteristic of its natural region and likely to persist including abiotic components and the composition and abundance of native species and biological communities, rates of change and supporting processes.

I have to admit that is a bit beyond me, because I'm not a scientist. But it is a *sine qua non* for this bill moving forward, and it is a gold standard. If it is the standard for all other parks in Canada, surely for Canada's first truly urban national park, it should be enshrined in this legislation. I would be interested in the member's observations with respect to the Conservative's lead speaker and his exchange with the Minister of Environment over this very clause.

• (1130)

Mr. Wayne Stetski: Mr. Speaker, across Canada, there are parks of different sizes, and different resource management techniques are appropriate depending on the size of those parks. In large parks, including Banff, Kootenay, and Yoho, things like fire, for example, are a natural part of that ecosystem, and are potentially used to maintain that ecosystem and make sure ecological integrity continues. In smaller parks, ecological integrity, in the case of Rouge, for example, would be making sure that we protect the 23 federally designated species at risk, that we are ensuring a healthy future for 1,700 plant and animal species. To suggest that we cannot have ecological integrity without lighting it on fire or burning it, I think is a misrepresentation.

Mr. John Aldag (Cloverdale—Langley City, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to commend the member for Kootenay—Columbia for his lifetime of work on protected areas, and in particular the work he has done on our protected spaces study on the environment committee, the very thoughtful perspective he brings, and his very reasoned approach to the discussion on protected areas in Canada. The comments that were offered on this bill were very much in keeping with that spirit that he brings to this House.

I also want to continue with the ecological integrity theme. I was reading that already in the Rouge, Parks Canada has been able to complete 15 ecosystem restoration projects in 2015, including things like reforestation 7.6 hectares of woodland habitat, creating 16 hectares of new woodlands, and planting over 18,000 native trees. In 2016, we have already seen 16 restoration projects undertaken by Parks Canada, including seven new wetlands, and stream bank rehabilitation.

The question I would put to the member opposite is whether he was as surprised as I was when the member for Thornhill dismissively referred to it as this ecological integrity thing? Does the member have any comments?

The member has spoken a bit about the value of ecological integrity in a national urban park. If he perhaps could provide a bit more elaboration on why ecological integrity is of such importance to Rouge National Urban Park, that would be appreciated.

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Mr. Wayne Stetski: Mr. Speaker, I would also like to thank the member across the aisle for his lifelong dedication to national parks.

While I have the opportunity, I have to say that the parks and protected areas committee we have been working with should serve as a model for other committees, because the members have stayed focused on principles throughout the discussion on ensuring a better future for national parks. It has been great to be part of that committee.

In terms of ecological integrity, the Rouge is one of the most biologically diverse areas in all of Canada. There is definitely opportunity, as we can see from what has happened in the past, to work on ecosystem restoration in Rouge park, whether they are small or larger ecosystems. Ecological integrity was key to getting this park transferred from the province to the federal government. It wanted a sense of comfort that there would be strong protection of ecological values. I think that is potentially where we are going with Rouge park.

When I was not managing parks, I worked on private land conservation for two years. We can absolutely have well-managed agriculture and conservation protection side by side, because a well-managed agricultural piece of land contributes to conservation far more than a paved parking lot.

• (1135)

Ms. Linda Duncan (Edmonton Strathcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague who represents Kootenay—Columbia not only for his stellar speech on this bill but for his ongoing work to protect our national parks and protected areas. I really value his work, including on the committee. I particularly appreciated his mention of the importance of providing natural areas with protection near our larger urban areas and the importance of connectivity.

As I understand it, the very reason we have to have ecological integrity as the first and foremost criterion for the minister and Parks Canada to consider in protection is that unless we have connectivity, none of the plants or threatened species will be able to survive. They need that connectivity.

I am charged by the fact that the Green Budget Coalition is asking for a green infrastructure definition that includes the protection of green areas. There is a group in my own city that would like to have a national urban park reserve for the North Saskatchewan River.

I am wondering if the member could speak to the importance of giving attention to the federal government helping to protect natural areas near our large urban centres so that people can have a place to relax, enjoy nature, and protect important species.

Mr. Wayne Stetski: Mr. Speaker, when we live in an urban area and have small pockets of important ecological areas, those ecological areas are important not only on their own but for their educational value to the people who live around them. We can use these areas to teach people about the importance of conservation and national parks.

I lived in Winnipeg for many years. The Living Prairie Museum, in Winnipeg, has one of the last remnants of protected tall grass prairie anywhere. That little ecosystem, right in the city of Winnipeg,

has to have special protection and special management if we are going to make sure that this particular ecosystem survives.

We absolutely need more national urban parks across Canada. They are also good for the soul. They are good for helping with nature deficit disorder. It would be a good thing to have more of these in the future.

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I think there is a lot of agreement in this House about the importance of national parks and the wisdom of what the previous government did, which in some sense is being continued by the current government.

We are having this discussion about the legal implications of the term “ecological integrity”. I think we can all agree that as a philosophical concept, this is important, but in the practical context of the legislation, there is real concern about what this means in an urban park. We are not talking about a wilderness park, where there is untouched wilderness being preserved. We are talking about trying to protect a natural environment in a context where there is, and where there should continue to be, I think we agree, agricultural activities and other such things.

I wonder if the member can comment on the fact that there needs to be clarity around the protections that exist but also around the reality that we do not want to interfere with agriculture and other sorts of things that are going on.

Mr. Wayne Stetski: Mr. Speaker, when we think about ecological integrity in a place like Rouge, we think about a marsh area, for example. Maintaining ecological integrity in a situation like this means keeping the marsh as a marsh and not putting a parking lot in, for example, to provide access to the park. If there is a particular piece of forest land with unique species, it means keeping it as forest land.

Protecting ecological integrity means trying to ensure that the species that are there, particularly rare and endangered species, will continue to be there in the future. That can be done at a small level or a larger level. In the case of an urban park, this can happen on a very small level, but it is really important to protect the ecological integrity.

• (1140)

Mr. Gary Anandasangaree (Scarborough—Rouge Park, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is my honour and privilege to speak today in support of Bill C-18, an act to amend the Rouge National Urban Park Act, the Parks Canada Agency Act and the Canada National Parks Act.

Today I will spend my time focusing primarily on amendments to the Rouge National Urban Park Act. I will be splitting my time with my good friend from Scarborough—Guildwood.

I must admit that this debate is one that is very close to my heart, not just because the name of my riding includes Rouge Park but because it is a place where many of my life's memories were created. It is a park where my two daughters planted trees and where we often go bike riding together in the summer. It is where we, as a family, go to see the colours change in the fall.

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I am not alone. Rouge Park is a place of great significance for people from all across the greater Toronto area. It is located within one hour of 20% of Canada's population. For those who have discovered it, it is a place of serenity, which was famously captured by F.H. Varley, a member of Canada's Group of Seven, and one where over 1,700 species of plants, birds, fish, mammals, insects, reptiles, and amphibians live. For the majority of people who have not been to the park, it is theirs to discover.

Last spring our Prime Minister was at Rouge Park for the annual Paddle the Rouge with his partner, Sophie Grégoire Trudeau, and their daughter, Ella-Grace. They were joined by the Minister of Environment and Climate Change and the Minister of Health. At the event, our Prime Minister said of the park:

It's a natural haven in the middle of a large city. That's pretty amazing. And it's something that should be protected.

He went on to say,

You know, when I talk to people about what it means to be Canadian, and the so-called "Canadian identity", there are a few things that are echoed right across the country. Whether I'm in a big city or a small town, people always talk about nature, parks, and enjoying the great outdoors.

It is this Canadian identity that we are strengthening today, and what better way to remind Canadians of this identity than the lead-up to our 150th birthday next year. What a great gift to the people who surround the park and to all Canadians.

Rouge park is nestled in the Rouge River valley between Scarborough and Pickering and expands north into Markham and the township of Uxbridge. Once completed, this beautiful park will span 79.1 square kilometres. It is Canada's first national urban park, and it is the result of countless years of work by community advocates.

Let us take a moment to look at the history of the park and why Bill C-18 is needed.

The Rouge National Urban Park Act was passed by the previous government in 2015. However, the legislation did not meet, let alone exceed, protections that already existed under provincial law, thereby preventing the Province of Ontario from transferring its lands to Parks Canada.

The existing act requires the minister, in the management of the park, to take into consideration the protection of its national ecosystems and cultural landscapes and the maintenance of its native wildlife and the health of those ecosystems. It fell fall short of ensuring that the ecological integrity of the park was protected and left safeguarding the park's ecology to the discretion of Parks management.

The current Minister of Environment and Climate Change committed to ecological integrity. The Government of Ontario rightly refused to transfer its lands for the creation of the park until this commitment came to fruition.

[*Translation*]

By passing Bill C-18, our government will improve the Rouge National Urban Park Act and achieve the vision that park supporters have been developing for decades: a park where ecological integrity and environmental sustainability is central to its management.

[*English*]

The Rouge Park is one of the very few locations left in southern Ontario where Carolinian forest still grows. The park contains incredible biodiversity and houses several threatened species, including the Blanding's turtle, also known as the smiling turtle, and the red-shouldered hawk.

The Rouge Park is also a place of great significance to the indigenous people who lived on this land. The ancestors of the Mississaugas of the New Credit First Nation lived in the park, and the remains of some of the oldest known indigenous villages in Canada are found in it. Our government has worked closely with the Mississaugas of the New Credit and its current chief, Stacey Laforme, in discussions leading up to this legislation.

The preservation of these lands is not only important for the continuance of its ecological integrity but for protecting the unique culture it gave birth to.

The bill recognizes some of the farmers in the park whose families have worked this land for generations. The bill will allow those farmers to continue to farm with some level of certainty. It will allow them to invest in much-needed equipment, to borrow money for this equipment, and to work on their farms like the generations before them. This legislation ensures that while farmers can continue to farm on their traditional lands, it must be consistent with our objective of preserving the park's ecological integrity.

Bill C-18 will expand the park and ensure that no development occurs in the forests and farmland within its borders. It will ensure that this land remains green amidst the ever-growing pressure for development from a growing population. By putting ecological integrity at the core of the Rouge National Urban Park's management, we can protect the health of the Rouge River valley in perpetuity.

Mr. Speaker, I am obliged to thank a number of people, as this legislation is really lifelong work for many. Permit me to take a moment to thank the generations of people who have worked to bring us to this day, when we will expand and protect this national treasure for the future.

The largest urban park in North America, in one of the most populated cities in the world, did not happen by accident. It came together because over the years, our governments, communities, and people worked hard to preserve and protect these lands.

I want to start with Lois James, long considered the mother of the Rouge for her tireless advocacy. On August 5, 2003, she received the Order of Canada for her advocacy on the environment. At her induction ceremony, her work was summarized as follows:

Lois James is a champion of the environment and a nemesis to those who seek to destroy it. She rallied and sustained public and political support in order to safeguard the Rouge Valley's flora and fauna, watershed and wetlands.

Government Orders

The Rouge remains the life work for many like Lois James, including my friends Jim Robb, Kevin O'Connor, and Gloria Reszler, from the Friends of the Rouge Watershed. I want to acknowledge their work and intense advocacy on this issue. I know that FRW would have wanted us to go further in establishing an ecological corridor, but I sincerely believe that our commitments on environmental protection, as stated in this legislation, go a long way in meeting this objective.

CPAWS and the many environmental organizations that have advocated to protect the Rouge have worked very hard over the years. Many local community organizations, including the West Rouge Community Association, the Centennial Community and Recreation Association, and the Highland Creek Community Association are integral partners in this endeavour, as the park surrounds them, and so are the dozens of other organizations that predate me but are all nonetheless essential players, including the Save the Rouge Valley System coalition.

Most of the local politicians in Scarborough over the years have played a very important role in protecting the Rouge. I want to acknowledge my predecessors who represented the former riding of Scarborough—Rouge River for their hard work over the years. I want to thank my good friend, mentor, and colleague, the hon. member for Scarborough—Guildwood, along with my Scarborough caucus colleagues and the members of Parliament who surround the park for their persistent efforts.

Our Minister of Environment and Climate Change and her staff, along with the Minister of Health, have worked hard to ensure that this park becomes a legacy of our Canada 150 celebrations.

Let us admit that we would not be here if it were not for the great work of my friend the Hon. Brad Duguid, the Ontario Minister of Economic Development and Growth, and Glen Murray, the Ontario Minister of the Environment.

The Province of Ontario is to be commended for protecting our environment and for acting as the custodian of our park. Today they are satisfied that our legislation meets or exceeds the provincial threshold for environmental protection. I give my most heartfelt thanks to all those who have made this happen.

Ultimately, I want to thank the people of Scarborough—Rouge Park for believing in a grander vision for our community and those who worked hard, and at times alone, to achieve this vision. They never gave up, and while we have achieved a milestone today, it is only the beginning. Their efforts need to continue as the park takes shape over our lifetime.

• (1150)

Mrs. Cathy McLeod (Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this is certainly a very important park that has been created. Obviously we were part of the creation of this park. I would ask the member if he has looked the definition on Parks Canada's website around ecological integrity. In Canada, the majority of our parks have been in very remote, isolated areas.

The members are talking about the fact that this is great because it is so close to a huge majority of the population, but in actual fact under the ecological integrity component, it really talks about limiting access to the park, to sort of save the park.

We appropriately said this is a different kind of park, and that we needed to make sure farming is protected and to make sure people had access. Leaving out those words in no way eroded the importance of the park, but did allow for the enjoyment and use by many.

Mr. Gary Anandasangaree: Mr. Speaker, I know ecological integrity was essential. When I spoke to dozens of groups and individuals over the past three years, in the lead-up to the discussion on the park and in the bill before us today, the overwhelming feedback was that ecological integrity was front and centre. In fact, I did not speak to a single person who said otherwise.

When we look at new types of parks, such as urban parks, it is important that we keep to our core values. In my opinion, ecological integrity in our parks system is absolutely core. It is something we will not compromise on. It is important that this legislation recognizes that in fact there are people who are calling for this to be expanded every more. I think this finds the right balance to ensure that farming can still continue, as well as other activities, in the park.

Mr. Wayne Stetski (Kootenay—Columbia, NDP): Mr. Speaker, as the member was listing some of the other uses of the park, I was reflecting on the Group of Seven painting that sold last night for over \$9 million at auction. Sometimes people do not give nature the credit that it is due in terms of its economic value, in a number of ways.

Today, the Friends of the Rouge issued a release. There are two things that they are looking for in terms of potential amendments to the bill. The first one was the implementation of pre-existing greenbelt, Oak Ridges Moraine, Rouge Park, and watershed plans. The second was the addition of surrounding public lands to create a healthy and sustainable 100-plus kilometre square National Rouge Park.

I wonder if my friend and colleague would like to comment on those.

Mr. Gary Anandasangaree: Mr. Speaker, I thank my friend for his enormous advocacy and work on our parks.

The Friends of the Rouge, and I acknowledged them in my speech, have worked very hard over the years in getting us to this point. In fact, I would argue that without them, we would not even be here today. Their work and their continued advocacy is important. They have brought forward a number of suggestions over the years. I, too, received the email this morning, and certainly think our minister will give it due consideration.

It is important to understand that what we have today is the result of a number of important consultations, including with our first nations people, the Friends of the Rouge, and a number of other environmental groups, as well as farmers. This is a culmination of all of that.

Government Orders

Mr. John Aldag (Cloverdale—Langley City, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I particularly enjoyed hearing the personal experiences that the hon. member has had in Rouge Park.

He spoke quite eloquently about ecological integrity. It is a different sort of park. It has the farming piece. I would like to know, as a member of the community, if the member could comment on whether this legislation strikes that right balance between ecological integrity, traditional uses, and maintaining that rich experience that residents have had in the past.

• (1155)

Mr. Gary Anandasangaree: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my friend for those questions and his hard work over the years as a manager of parks.

It is very important to have ecological integrity. As someone who lives in the GTA, I drive through the park virtually every day. I recognize the very difficult circumstances in which the park is developed, and I recognize it is often impeded by human interaction. We have the 407 Highway and different infrastructure going through the park.

However, it is important to recognize that, connected to what we see in Stanley Park and maybe even Central Park, it is something that is preserved. Yes, it is hard. Ecological integrity is not easy. It will require work, and it will require commitment from all levels of government to ensure ecological integrity is front and centre of the park as we move forward.

Hon. John McKay (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the hon. member for Scarborough—Rouge Park for his kind remarks and for stealing all my thunder. He has been a tireless advocate for this park since he arrived here. This is a good day for both him and me and it is a good day for all of us in the eastern GTA area. Many folks have worked hard on this park.

Up front I want to declare a conflict of interest. I live about five kilometres away from the mouth of the Rouge River and I use this park quite regularly. I and my family enjoy the Rouge Park and all of its amenities. On Thanksgiving weekend my wife Carolyn and my children Caitlin, Rachael, and Sarah and their respective husbands and boyfriends and my grandchildren Nolan, Quinn, and Thatcher all went for a walk on one of the trails in the Rouge Park on a glorious fall day where we kicked leaves around. Those of us who are fortunate to live in that area know what it is to literally bike to the front of the park and start walking or bike right through the park. It is a wonderful treasure that we really do need to preserve.

The evolution of the park and for us to get to this day has been really driven by a citizens movement that actually does move politicians to do things. This did not happen over the course of the last decade or the last two decades or even the last three decades. It has been in some instances almost a lifetime to preserve this area of the eastern GTA for future generations, such as my own grandchildren. Without those dedicated folks, many of whom were mentioned by my hon. colleague from Scarborough—Rouge Park, we would not be here today. It simply would have been paved over or built upon or filled in or something egregious. These lands are very valuable lands. Those farms are very valuable pieces of acreage.

We are in a fortunate situation to be able to even talk about having a large urban park in this area.

There are a couple of names that my colleague missed, I am surprised, but I want to add into the names that he did mention Professor Bruce Kidd from the University of Toronto, Scarborough Campus. Both Centennial and Scarborough Campuses at UTSC have been immense contributors and will continue to be immense contributors to the whole concept of how we do ecological integrity in this park.

In addition, I want to mention a number of politicians who have been quite helpful in the creation of this park. One of my predecessors, a former Conservative environment minister, Pauline Browes, the hon. member for Wellington—Halton Hills, and Toronto's perfect mayor David Crombie, who I believe was a Conservative. Members may have noticed that I just mentioned three Conservative politicians, all of whom can make a legitimate claim to participating in the creation of this park. In addition, councillor Glenn De Baeremaeker and, as my hon. colleague has said, the minister for the Ontario government Minister Brad Duguid, who stood firm when this legislation was initially proposed by the previous government that frankly did not get it done.

Regardless of how management evolves on this park, this will be a challenge to ecological integrity. If I may I would like to take a moment to just walk members up from Lake Ontario north through the park. The first thing one would notice when walking north through the park is that the CN rail tracks and a GO train run through it.

• (1200)

Next up is Highway 401. Next up from that is Steeles Avenue. Next up from that are the CN tracks that come down from north Markham, through the park, and then out through Pickering. Next up from that after Steeles Avenue is Highway 407. Next up from that is Highway 7.

I mention all of this because these will be challenges for any park management and will be challenges for the whole concept of ecological integrity. Contained within the park, we have mentioned farms, but there are also businesses, and there is also a landfill site. That is going to be a challenge in and of itself. The Toronto Zoo is within the confines of the park. This will be a considerable challenge for whoever ends up with the responsibility to manage this park.

Ideally, this legislation would have been completed with the last government, but the previous government's stubborn insistence on a watered-down ecological integrity scared off the key partner to this endeavour, namely the Government of Ontario, and it basically torpedoed the legislation. At this point, the park is more of a parkette than anything else, and this is where the limitations of the House rules are such that I cannot show members what actual lands are in the park as we speak this very day. However it does not amount to much more than maybe two or three square kilometres. With this legislation, we would be adding a further 17 square kilometres, and with this legislation and the framework and the content of the legislation, the Government of Ontario would convey its land, as would the Toronto and Region Conservation Authority and other owners of the various lands throughout.

Government Orders

It is a pity that I cannot show this because it does show, in a very dramatic fashion, the immense amount of land that would flow from just a simple change to the legislation. I remember being in this House in the last Parliament and saying for the member for Wellington—Halton Hills that this is a simple amendment that can be done in a heartbeat. Yet the stubborn insistence of the previous government of not doing it meant that essentially what came out the other end of the framework legislation was a parkette rather than a park.

I also want to thank my Scarborough caucus colleagues, at both the provincial level and the federal level, for hanging tough through this. It is an important initiative for the eastern GTA, and I would say this is where political integrity meets ecological integrity.

As the Rouge park is the first national urban park in Canada, Parks Canada has welcomed the feedback of more than 20,000 Canadians and 200 organizations. This legislation would ensure that the park would have its ecological integrity as the first priority. As I said earlier, that is going to be a challenge, given all of the incursions and intrusions into the park.

The location of this park is the entrance point to the eastern element of Toronto. On one side we have Toronto, and on the other side we have Durham Region. Certainly thousands of people and possibly tens of thousands of people cross the park each and every day, so it would be a challenge to maintain ecological integrity. I do not doubt it. However it is absolutely necessary to do so. If we do not set the bar high, the pressures on the park to compromise on building permits, to compromise on roads, and to compromise on various other issues that will inevitably come up would be a challenge for anyone, no matter how willing he or she is to do the right thing.

For those who feel that we could have done better, let us not make perfection the enemy of the greater good. We have come a long way. Citizens have moved governments, and governments get us to where we are today.

• (1205)

Ms. Dianne L. Watts (South Surrey—White Rock, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have a question about the Government of Ontario and the ownership of its lands in the park. What are the impediments in terms of turning that land over to the federal government, so it is totally under the stewardship of the federal government?

Hon. John McKay: Mr. Speaker, the reason the provincial government would not turn over its lands after the main piece of legislation was given royal assent was that the previous legislation did not contain this very clause about ecological integrity, which means “a condition that is determined to be characteristic of its natural region and likely to persist”. I read it into the record earlier. However, as in proposed new subsection 6(1), it means that “Maintenance or restoration of ecological integrity, through the protection of natural resources...must be the first priority...”.

The Government of Ontario had no confidence that the park management would put ecological integrity as its first priority, and when it would not do that, then the Government of Ontario refused to transfer the lands.

Mrs. Cathy McLeod (Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is interesting, because I hear the description of the provincial land transfer, and as I understand it, the land in question was actually in abysmal condition. It was a dumping site, and there was no protection whatsoever. Indeed there is perspective from many that this was a political decision, not a decision for the greater good, given the status of the lands that were there.

If we read what ecological integrity is, we learn it is very important for Nahanni and other areas, but they talk about the population. Every single member has stood up and talked about the population around the park, and ecological integrity includes creating barriers to those people's enjoyment of that particular park because it recognizes that too much use creates issues. I would pose that to my colleague. Has he really looked at the definition and what it actually is going to mean to the use and his ability to use the park?

Hon. John McKay: Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for raising that question because it goes to the core issue. If we do not have this definition in the legislation, then there is no concept of ecological integrity. Therefore, every park management would have some sort of ability to do what it wants to do, when it wants to do it, and how it wants to do it. Standards would vary from park management to park manager to park manager.

By putting this in, we at least would have the standard to which all park managers and park management plans would be required to adhere. Therefore, we have the possibility of returning some of these lands somewhat closer to the state we all wish them to be in.

• (1210)

Mr. Gary Anandasangaree (Scarborough—Rouge Park, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I really appreciate my friend's comments and his reflections on the use of the park on a very personal basis. I too spent part of my Thanksgiving at the park with my family. In fact, it was the same thing the member for Scarborough—Guildwood was doing.

The sense I am trying to get from the member is how important the park is to the region. How important is it to the Scarborough area overall, and how important is it for us as a region to develop and be a hub for the environment, not just for the GTA but across Ontario?

Hon. John McKay: Madam Speaker, this is the anchor asset. This is the jewel in the eastern GTA crown, on which fantastic environmental science will be done by the University of Toronto, Centennial College, and various other ecological and environmental organizations. This is critical.

Mr. Robert Sopuck (Dauphin—Swan River—Neepawa, CPC): Madam Speaker, I enjoyed hearing the previous speaker. It is always great to hear people, who have never taken any courses in the science of ecology, talking about the science of ecology. It showed.

I am very proud to rise in this House today to speak on Bill C-18, an act to amend the Rouge National Urban Park Act, the Parks Canada Agency Act, and the Canada National Parks Act.

Canadians recognize that it was the previous Conservative government that created Rouge National Urban Park by passing Bill C-40 on May 15, 2015. I was proud to be part of that government.

Government Orders

In the 2011 Speech from the Throne, our previous government also committed \$143.7 million over 10 years to the creation of the Rouge National Urban Park. We understood the importance of this park and did not play politics with it.

However, the Ontario Liberal government thought it could play politics with the creation of this park. After Liberal provincial infrastructure minister Chiarelli secretly demanded a \$100 billion payment for the land transfer, which was rejected on principle by our Conservative government, Liberal provincial minister Duguid wrote a letter as political cover, stating that the Ontario government would not transfer lands until the Rouge National Urban Park Act was amended to ensure that the first priority of park management was ecological integrity.

If we go back to what our act said, in that section, we see it said:

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.

That pretty much covers it all. Clearly, this ecological integrity play by the Ontario government was nothing but a ploy.

We now see, of course, that the federal Liberals are thanking their provincial cousins for their political assistance and are moving forward with the ecological integrity designation. It is important to note that the former CEO of Parks Canada, Alan Latourelle, disagreed very strongly with the ecological integrity designation, as it was an unrealistic approach to an urban park, which it is.

Mr. Latourelle was the CEO when Rouge National Urban Park was created. He says:

...all lands to be included in the Rouge National Urban Park Act will legally preclude all of the inappropriate uses—

He is referring to Ontario parks.

—mentioned above and will ensure that the vision of linking Lake Ontario to the Oak Ridges Moraine becomes a reality...

Any organization that implies that the Rouge National Urban Park Act does not meet current provincial legislation is misleading the public. There is simply no act that has been passed by the Ontario legislature that places ecological integrity as the first priority on Rouge lands owned by Ontario.

He went on to note:

In developing its management and legislative approach for Rouge National Urban Park, Parks Canada was guided by the IUCN's Urban Protected Areas: Profiles and best practice guidelines. It is important to underline the fact that Rouge National Urban Park very clearly meets or exceeds all 30 of the IUCN's urban protected area guidelines. In fact, based on the Agency's review, the Rouge National Urban Park Act is the strongest legislation governing IUCN urban parks in the world.

It is clear that the way our government had set the park up was world class.

I will be supporting the legislation in principle, but it will need to be amended at committee for that support to continue. Let me explain why.

It is my strong belief that our national parks are about people. They are for people. They are about allowing people to have access to and explore nature. As well, national parks protect certain ecosystems and the biological, chemical, hydrological, and physical processes that are required by healthy ecosystems.

At the time of the park's creation, our government determined that the integrated approach was the most appropriate for the Rouge Park. There were 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 former provincially appointed managing authority of Rouge Park, had asked for. This would allow the Rouge's natural, cultural, and agricultural resources to receive the highest level of protection now and far into the future.

Ecological integrity as the first priority of park management could be an opening to the interference with or even the removal of farmers from the park, which would be a real travesty.

● (1215)

The purpose of the Rouge Park, at least when we created it, is not to force farmers off the land, but these amendments could have that effect. Furthermore, the term "ecological integrity" implies a "leave it alone" approach to park management.

The leave it alone approach to managing lands is usually advocated by people who do not spend any time in nature. Farmers, ranchers, trappers or hunters know there is no such thing as leaving nature alone.

I will again go back to the previous act, which states, "The Minister must...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."

It is important to also recognize the need to manage nature to achieve desired outcomes and to protect cultural landscapes. This is in direct opposition to the leave it alone approach advocated by many activists, most of whom have spent no time in nature at all.

Cultural landscapes in the Rouge National Urban Park refer to the agricultural operations that are currently operating within the park. Furthermore, there is no such thing as a static environment. Nature is changing all the time. There are droughts, floods, fires, invading species, plant successions, and so on. There are times when humans must "step in and actively manage nature".

Back home in western Manitoba, we have been enduring years of high rainfall and floods. The ecosystem has changed dramatically, as have the wildlife species. Therefore, we are building drains and trying to manage water. Again, there are times when human beings must step in to manage nature.

A few years ago I purchased whose title intrigued me, and I have referred to it a number of times. It is called *The God Species* and is authored by environmental Mark Lynas. It is about how the planet can survive the age of humans.

Government Orders

Lynas states that human beings have become such a planetary force that we must step in when things are going wrong, and we have an obligation to step in to manage lands to deliver ecosystem health.

He says:

[Working] at a planetary level is essential if creation is not to be irreparably damaged or even destroyed by humans unwittingly deploying our new-found powers in disastrous ways. At this late stage, false humility is a more urgent danger than hubris...we must help it regain the stability it needs to function as a self-regulating, highly dynamic and complex system.

He goes on to note:

Most importantly, environmentalists need to remind themselves that humans are not all bad. We evolved within this living biosphere, and we have as much right to be here as any other species... The Age of Humans does not have to be an era of hardship and misery for other species; we can nurture and protect as well as dominate and conquer. But in any case, the first responsibility of a conquering army is always to govern.

As a person who owns a farm and spends a lot of time in nature, what Lynas is talking about is stewardship. Stewardship is a very good, benign, and positive word when it comes to what human beings do with the environment.

The idea of pristine nature is largely a myth. William Denevan, from the University of Wisconsin, wrote a paper called, "The Pristine Myth: The Landscape of the Americas in 1492". In it he noted this with respect to the Latin American forest:

Large expanses of Latin American forests are humanized forests in which the kinds, numbers, and distributions of useful species are managed by human populations.

Aboriginal people lit prairie fires on a regular basis to keep the woody species down and ensure lots of grass for the bison herds that they depended on. One of the management strategies for wetlands is to draw wetlands down periodically and allow the soil to dry out and improve the health of wetlands.

On my farm, because I liked having wildlife around, I have created openings in the forests, and I am able to improve wildlife populations.

● (1220)

The recreational fisheries community, working with fishery biologists, create new fish spawning areas. The Miramichi Salmon Association, through our recreational fisheries conservation program, creates cold water refugia for Atlantic salmon so they can survive warm water temperatures. Therefore, active management of landscapes and the environment is more common than not.

Europe, for example, is one completely managed landscape, designed to deliver certain ecosystem services to people, from agriculture to forestry to wildlife. Therefore, rural Europe is one big managed garden.

Again, only in North America can we have this peculiar conceit about pristine landscapes. We are the only place in the world that talks this way. The rest of the world has to actively manage landscapes to deliver certain ecological outcomes. However, we are actually getting pretty good at this now, although it has taken many years. Our knowledge is growing all the time and we are making better decisions all the time.

Getting back to Rouge National Urban Park, it is a highly impacted park. It is surrounded by development. The term

"ecological integrity" very much implies a leave it alone and hope things work out approach. We will have invasive species in there. We will perhaps have the hydrological cycle disrupted because of the way the highway patterns are. A whole bunch of things are going to happen in there. Will the government do anything about it? The traditional Parks Canada approach is to leave it alone.

Interestingly enough, there are many instances where human beings have touched the earth very lightly and created conditions that are better ecologically than otherwise would have been. Let us take Grasslands National Park in Saskatchewan, for example. I have had the honour of visiting it a few times.

Grasslands National Park was created by ranchers. If it were not for the ranchers grazing, and the way they grazed, that national park would not have the attributes it has now, and it would not have had the attributes that would have made it a desirable place to create one of Canada's most unique and important national parks, which creates unique, rare, and important plant and animal communities. It is all because of what the ranchers did.

Parks Canada's initial view when the park was being created was that the ranchers had to go. However, it quickly realized that it was grazing that kept the park's ecosystem intact. I check recently and cattle ranching has continued to be part of the management of Grasslands National Park.

As I said earlier, I have the honour of owning a farm, 480 acres, with 320 acres under a permanent conservation easement with the nature conservancy. Therefore, I have my own mini-Rouge Park with a bit of agriculture in it, forest, wetlands, and wildlife. From personal experience, there are ways to touch the land very lightly and deliver the things people want.

My riding also happens to encompass Riding Mountain National Park. I live very close to that park. In fact, it is one of the reasons I moved there.

Although Riding Mountain National Park is a rural park, it has some characteristics similar to Rouge National Urban Park. It is about 1,000 square kilometres, or maybe bigger, but it is a large park surrounded by a sea of agriculture. The park is very important, and it is one of the few aspen parks. It protects the very rare rough fescue prairie. The bird diversity is extremely rich in summer. There are high populations of elk, moose, deer, plus wolves and black bears. It is an absolutely wonderful place.

It started off as a Dominion forest reserve in the late 1800s as a source of wood for the settlers, and then it became a park. Forestry was allowed up until I think the 1960s and early 1970s, and then was eliminated, just like that. The people who cut wood on a sustainable basis were told to leave. As a result of that, the forest kept getting older and older. Keep in mind, there is no fire suppression in Riding Mountain National Park. Therefore, is this a natural ecosystem?

Government Orders

In the name of ecological integrity, grazing was eliminated in the park. There were a number of ranchers who were allowed to graze their cattle in the park, but I think it was in the mid-1970s that they were all summarily told to leave, at great cost to individual farmers, and with no compensation whatsoever.

• (1225)

In the 1970s, the Liberal government kicked the farmers out of the Riding Mountain National Park, with no compensation. There was some great cost to wildlife as well. What haying and grazing did in that park was maintain the grasslands. Elk especially are a grassland species, so elk populations suffered because of this.

Adapting ecological integrity in the Rouge could see many Rouge farmers evicted from working farms that have been in production since as early as 1799.

If the Liberals say that they support both farming and ecological integrity, as it is legally defined by the Canada National Parks Act, they are at best naive, or misinformed or, at worst, misleading the farming community. These farmers, who have been responsible stewards of the economy for generations, must be allowed to remain in the park.

Interestingly, wildlife is always an attribute in national parks. People like seeing deer, for example, apart from the fact that they run in front of our cars. The point is that high deer populations are, by and large, well liked. People very much enjoy seeing Canada geese and waterfowl flying around.

What the farming in Rouge Park does, especially if the farmers are growing corn, soybeans and grains, is provide very important food for wildlife species. Some might say it is just artificial. It is not, because farming is part of the ecosystem of that park.

What Rouge Park has the potential to be a very diverse and wonderful place where ecological services and cultural amenities are conserved and protected.

During the committee hearings on Bill C-40 in the previous Parliament, we heard from Mr. Larry Noonan from the Altona Forest Community Stewardship Committee. He 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...

It is very important. Ecological integrity talks about letting it all happen, fires and floods.

It is clear, as Mr. Noonan continued that “Ecological integrity cannot be applied to an urban national park”. He was very clear, and he has the moral 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.

Only two of the 11 committee witnesses supported or espoused ecological integrity during the previous Parliament. Eighty-one per cent of the witnesses present did not ask for ecological integrity to be included, yet the Liberals chose to use it in the legislation before us.

The true definition of “ecological integrity” would imply letting forest fires burn, floods to run their course and wildlife to survive without human intervention. A number of species of wildlife are problematic, such as raccoons and skunks that carry rabies. Will this park be a reservoir for those species? Perhaps it is now.

The Rouge sits alongside residential neighbourhoods, has highways, power lines, a pipeline across various parts of it, working farmland, a former landfill dump site and an old auto wreckers yard. For these reasons, any attempt at calling our actions “ecological integrity” would be in words only.

Ecological integrity, as the primary guiding principle for the park, is an unrealistic measure for an urban park that was established to introduce Canadians to nature, local culture and agricultural, the first of its kind in Canada.

• (1230)

In real terms, if the government were to apply the concept of ecological integrity to the Rouge National Urban Park the consequences on local communities and municipalities could be dire. The creation of Rouge National Urban Park was a great accomplishment for which I am very proud of our former Conservative government. I would urge the Liberals to reconsider their adamant and unwarranted support for the inclusion of ecological integrity as the first priority of park management.

Mr. Gary Anandasangaree (Scarborough—Rouge Park, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I am quite concerned that my friend is talking about ecological integrity as though it is not an issue in the park. I know the number of stakeholders I have met over the past three years have over and over again stated the need for ecological integrity. If anything, people have felt that we have not gone far enough.

I would like to get a sense from my friend whether this matters to him in any way, shape, or form, either for this park or any other park. Does he does not want to make sure that our environment is protected, and that our park, which really should be a gold standard, not just for Canada but around the world, in an urban setting should have a very important goal of balancing the need for people to use the park with ensuring that our environment and ecology are protected?

Mr. Robert Sopuck: Madam Speaker, as someone who has donated 320 acres of his own land to conservation in perpetuity, I will take no lessons from the member opposite in terms of who cares about the environment.

The old act was very clear. It talked about the conservation of ecological, cultural, and agricultural amenities in the national park. Again, it is all about ecological processes. Ecological integrity is a term that almost cannot be defined. What the park should be working toward is a sound hydrological cycle, diversity of bird species, a high population of mammal species, a high diversity of native plant species, and a thriving and functioning agriculture.

Throwing around meaningless terms that activists love to use flies in the face of people who have scientific training in ecology and those who have spent a lot of time in nature, like many of the ranchers and farmers on our side who truly understand how nature works. The way we had that park set up would make nature work for all of us.

Government Orders

•(1235)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Anne Minh-Thu Quach (Salaberry—Suroît, NDP): Madam Speaker, I do not understand why is it so hard for the Conservatives to understand that all Canadians, all environmentalists, and even some farmers support this bill.

When they were in office, the Conservatives tried to divide farmers and pit them against environmentalists. That did not make any sense. Conservative Bill C-40, which was passed in the previous Parliament, was so weak that even the Government of Ontario refused to turn over the 9,000 acres of parkland because it did not think that the land would be protected properly.

How then can my colleague oppose a conservation bill? It is beyond me. This bill helps fight climate change, protect the environment, and leave future generations a healthy planet.

[*English*]

Mr. Robert Sopuck: Madam Speaker, that is more babble from the NDP from somebody who knows nothing about how the environment works.

I will again quote Mr. Alan Latourelle, the former CEO of Parks Canada, who penned this letter after he left Parks Canada and was not bound by the government rules of his occupation anymore. He wrote, “In fact, based on the Agency’s review, the Rouge National Urban Park Act is the strongest legislation governing IUCN urban parks in the world.”

To suggest that on this side we do not care about the environment is a slander and it is not true. All of us on this side of the House give of ourselves. We actually do things about the environment, we work for Ducks Unlimited, we donate our lands for conservation. The members on the other side just talk. We actually do things, and by doing things we care about the environment and we actually fix the earth. Our approach is by far the best approach.

Mr. Gary Anandasangaree: Madam Speaker, I think our friend is still in denial about climate change and the need for our country to protect the environment. He is finally realizing that science is an important aspect in decision-making. I am really happy he has mentioned that.

What is really curious to me is that we fail to understand, in 2016, the need to protect the environment and the need to balance having a park in an urban setting, but at the same time ensuring that our environment is protected.

Why is the member refusing to accept what everybody else in this country, and certainly in my riding, have accepted for a very long time?

Mr. Robert Sopuck: Madam Speaker, after a 35-year career in environmental conservation, I will accept nothing from the member opposite when he challenges my environmental commitment or my environmental credentials.

What this is about is the land itself and the ability of the land to deliver ecological goods and services. Rouge National Urban Park is extremely important. Again, in case the member did not hear, the former CEO of Parks Canada, after he left the agency, and who did not have to say it, said that using the concept of ecological integrity

in Rouge National Urban Park is inappropriate, and as well, the current regulations that govern Rouge National Urban Park are the strongest and best in the world.

Perhaps the member opposite should listen and learn some science.

Mr. Earl Dreeshen (Red Deer—Mountain View, CPC): Madam Speaker, earlier today I had heard members and our former environment minister talking about how agriculture is still close by, as far as the Rouge National Urban Park was concerned, and that people from the city would come out and find out just what was happening in the country.

That is so important, because so many people are far removed from agriculture right now. I am thinking back to stories of my family, back in 1908, in Alberta, and of prairie fires, all the way from Calgary to the Red Deer River. As farmers end up getting into those communities, and they start building roads and start having fire suppression, it changes the way in which the environment is dealt with. It also allows us to take care of agriculture and to take care of feeding the world.

Could the member speak to the importance of agriculture, the importance of ecology, how farmers are able to work together, and how this fits into the Rouge National Urban Park discussion?

•(1240)

Mr. Robert Sopuck: Madam Speaker, the hon. member is an active farmer, and he has shown me some of the pictures of his farm. The farm is beautiful, as are the wetlands on his farm. There is a gentleman who actually cares about the environment, and actually does something about it rather than just talking about it.

Right now, hundreds and thousands of farmers across Canada are participating in co-operative conservation programs. I am on the fisheries committee, and we are doing a review of the Fisheries Act. Ron Bonnett, President of the Canadian Federation of Agriculture, to use a specific example, talked about how he accessed the program to move his cattle away from a stream, fence them away from the water, and install a solar-powered water pump so the cattle would not have to drink from the stream but could drink off-site. He saw an immediate improvement in water quality. He saw more fish.

Across Canada, and in my area for example, the Nature Conservancy has placed conservation easements, voluntarily, on many thousands of acres of farmland, land that will be protected in perpetuity. Farmers have instituted winter wheat, which provides nesting cover for birds. They apply zero tillage, which minimizes soil loss and erosion into waterways. In the cattle ranching community, rest rotational grazing is one of the best practices to preserve biodiversity and allow a more efficient cattle operation.

I could go on and on, in terms of what the farming and ranching community have done for Canada’s environment. It is largely unsung. I wish more people could see it, and because of Rouge National Urban Park, we are going to have a major demonstration farm close to a major city. People will now really see the environmental stewardship, ethics, and programs that our farmers undertake.

Government Orders

Mrs. Salma Zahid (Scarborough Centre, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I will be splitting my time with the hon. member for Cloverdale—Langley City.

As the member of Parliament for Scarborough Centre it is truly a pleasure to stand in the House in support of a bill that will ensure Rouge National Urban Park, a true Scarborough jewel, will be protected for generations to come.

With Bill C-18, an act to amend the Rouge National Urban Park Act, the Parks Canada Agency Act, and the Canada National Parks Act, our government is fulfilling a key campaign commitment to the people of Scarborough and is ensuring that millions of people in the greater Toronto area and Canadians from coast to coast to coast will continue to have access to an even larger Rouge National Urban Park on the edge of Canada's largest city. In fact, over 20% of Canada's population lives within an hour's drive of the park.

I would like to thank the hon. Minister of Environment for bringing forward this legislation so early in this government's mandate and especially for the open and consultative approach she and her team have taken in drafting this legislation.

Shortly after the government was sworn in last year, my fellow Scarborough members of Parliament and I reached out to the minister and her department to press the importance of acting swiftly to protect the Rouge and to remind her of the commitments our campaign made to the people of Scarborough to amend the Rouge National Urban Park Act. The minister's team immediately launched an extensive consultative process that included local environmental and activist groups, local farmers and business operators, the Ontario provincial government, and the indigenous community.

The environment minister also visited the park with me and other members of our Scarborough caucus to view this ecological wonder first-hand and to hear directly from Parks Canada employees, the local community groups working so hard to protect the park, and other stakeholders. This is a great example of this government's commitment to consultation with Canadians, and I applaud the Environment Minister for her leadership on Bill C-18.

What is the Rouge National Urban Park? To me, most of all it is a piece of nature and natural wonder on the edge of Scarborough that offers urban residents, especially young people and middle-class families, a chance to experience nature and wilderness that is just a transit ride away.

On the edge of the concrete jungle, the Rouge Park is a green oasis. The Rouge National Urban Park stretches from Lake Ontario in the south, north to York region and the post-glacial Oak Ridges moraine.

Humans have been in the Rouge Park for more than 10,000 years, from paleolithic nomadic hunters to Iroquoian farmers, from early European explorers to the modern urban explorers of today.

Within the park are two national historic sites. The Toronto Carrying Place was an important portage route created by the local indigenous people that was later used by European fur traders and settlers. The Bead Hill archaeological site is an intact 17th-century Seneca village, which has been minimally excavated and is protected from development.

The Rouge National Urban Park is a place for nature, for culture, and even for agriculture. It is a place for hiking and camping, for exploration and adventure. It is a place for paddling. This year, the Prime Minister and his family showed off their canoeing skills at the annual Paddle the Rouge. This year's event was the biggest yet with over 160 paddlers, including 50 young people, coming out to learn to paddle.

The Rouge National Urban Park is a place for family and for community. It is also a place for youth for field trips with their teachers to learn about ecology and nature, and exploration and adventure on the weekend with friends.

The Rouge National Urban Park is home to the Rouge Valley Conservation Centre, which runs amazing guided walks and environmental educational programs in the park, including summer camps.

● (1245)

While it has not been as often as I would like, I have visited Rouge National Urban Park several times with my husband and sons. It is great to have this place to reconnect with nature and the environment so close to the city. I would encourage more Canadians to take the time to visit Canada's national parks. I would remind Canadians, that as part of the 150th anniversary celebrations of Canadian Confederation, admission to all our national parks, national historic sites, and national marine conservation areas is free in 2017. Therefore, Madam Speaker, I hope to see you, and many other Canadians, in Scarborough for your summer vacation next year.

Our government is committed to expanding Rouge National Urban Park and ensuring it is safe from development, with stringent environmental protections. These goals are achieved by Bill C-18. This bill will nearly double the size of the park. The strengthened environmental protections in this legislation were developed in close collaboration with the Government of Ontario, indigenous peoples, and local stakeholders, and will ensure that the park will be preserved for generations to come.

While this is the only urban national park in Canada, with Bill C-18, the protections for Rouge National Urban Park are now as stringent as those protecting every other national park in Canada, from the Pacific Rim National Park in the west, to Cape Breton Highlands National Park in the east.

Bill C-18 will also enlarge the park, bringing it closer to its natural and eventual size, with the addition of another 17.1 square kilometres of land in the northern portion of the park being transferred from Transport Canada. At 79.1 square kilometres, Rouge National Urban Park will be 10 times larger than Vancouver's Stanley Park, and 22 times larger than Central Park in New York City.

Government Orders

We must be guided by the principle of ecological integrity. Ecosystems have integrity when their native components, including wildlife, native plants, waters, and ecological processes, are intact. In the past 12 months alone, Parks Canada has completed 15 ecological restoration, farmland enhancement, and scientific research projects.

I recognize that as far as Bill C-18 goes, it may not meet every request of every group that has an interest in the park. I know that the minister and her team have listened carefully to the concerns of all stakeholder groups, and they have done their best to craft a bill that addresses as many of their concerns as possible and balances the needs of all stakeholders. If groups have ideas to improve this legislation, I would encourage them to bring their concerns forward as Bill C-18 moves on to the committee stage. I would ask that these concerns be given careful consideration. However, I believe that in the spirit of balance and open consultation, Bill C-18 is a bill that meets our commitments to protect Rouge National Urban Park for generations to come.

Scarborough is happy to share Rouge National Urban Park with all Canadians, and I am proud to support this legislation, which will ensure that it will be protected for future generations to come.

Madam Speaker, we will see you in the Rouge.

• (1250)

Mr. Gary Anandasangaree (Scarborough—Rouge Park, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I want to thank my friend for her hard work on this issue. We meet as a Scarborough caucus regularly. This is something that we have discussed, and here we are today.

First, I want to get a sense from the member as to what the impact of the park will be on our community in Scarborough, and, second, because some members have said we have not gone far enough, whether she feels we have gone far enough with respect to environmental integrity. I am wondering if my friend can comment on that, and what kind of responses she is hearing from her constituents.

Mrs. Salma Zahid: Madam Speaker, I want to thank the hon. member for Scarborough—Rouge Park for his hard work on this important legislation. Since we have been elected, we, as members of the Scarborough caucus, have been fighting hard, and it is great to be talking about Rouge Park.

I think that ecological integrity is an important component. It is like motherhood, hockey, and maple syrup. Even before the election, and over the past year, we have heard from almost every stakeholder, activist group, and local resident on the importance of having ecological integrity.

This is very important for the people living in Scarborough and neighbourhoods in the GTA. It is a park in a city where people can be close to nature. Therefore, it is very important that the ecological integrity of Rouge Park be protected.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Anne Minh-Thu Quach (Salaberry—Suroît, NDP): Madam Speaker, I will give some statistics regarding infrastructure because, while they were in office, the Conservatives made significant cuts to Park Canada. The *Toronto Star* reported that the number of scientific staff positions had been cut by 33% and that

there was a \$3-billion backlog of maintenance and repair work in 2014.

The current Liberal government has promised to meet the Aichi targets concerning biodiversity and the protection of land and marine areas by 2020. I am therefore wondering what the Liberals intend to do in terms of funding infrastructure and scientific activities. How will they be able to meet those objectives and assure us that Parks Canada will have the funding it needs to work with adequate infrastructure?

[*English*]

Mrs. Salma Zahid: Madam Speaker, today we are debating ecological integrity and the changes that are being brought to the Rouge National Urban Park Act.

It is very important that we protect the ecological integrity of the Rouge National Urban Park. I heard the need for ecological integrity loud and clear, from the area's stakeholder groups and local residents.

I am very happy that our government has taken action on this and brought this important legislation forward. We will be working to bring more changes, if changes are brought up in committee.

• (1255)

Mr. John Aldag (Cloverdale—Langley City, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I would like to thank the member for her comments and speaking about Rouge Park and the important role it will play in the greater Toronto area. I appreciated her mentioning that parks in Canada will be free to Canadians in 2017 as part of the Canada 150 celebrations.

Could the member spend a minute or two speaking about what the opportunities will be, and the importance of the residents of the greater Toronto area being able to engage throughout Canada's 150th celebration in the Rouge National Urban Park?

Mrs. Salma Zahid: Madam Speaker, I think it is very important that, as we celebrate the 150th anniversary of Confederation in Canada, that all the national parks will be free. The residents of the GTA and Scarborough will be able to take advantage of that by visiting the Rouge National Urban Park, which is a park in the city. It is close to nature, and a place where families can go for hikes and camping. There are a lot of summer camps held there. As mentioned, this year's Paddle the Rouge was a great success.

I am looking forward—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): I am sorry, but the time is up.

Resuming debate, the hon. member for Cloverdale—Langley City.

Mr. John Aldag (Cloverdale—Langley City, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I would like to thank the Minister of Environment and Climate Change for bringing Bill C-18 before the House. As someone who has spent 34 years of my career working with Parks Canada in national parks and national historic sites, it is a real pleasure to be here speaking in favour of the bill. I grew up on a farm in Saskatchewan, in an area that was close to where Grasslands National Park was created.

Government Orders

We have heard about the importance of parks and conservation, so it is a real pleasure to see the continuation of Rouge National Urban Park proceeding through the House today. This is an opportunity to remind the country that while we have heard today how Rouge National Urban Park is important to the greater Toronto area, it is also really important to Canadians. This would bring it under the fold of protected areas under the management of Parks Canada. It is a great piece for protected areas in Canada.

The legislation is also an important administrative piece that would allow for efficient and effective management of Rouge National Urban Park, plus changes to the Parks Canada Agency Act and the National Parks Act regarding Wood Buffalo National Park. The bill deals with these three pieces.

I am going to begin by talking about the Rouge National Urban Park element. The park has been under consideration for a lot of years, going back to 1995, with the involvement of the Province of Ontario and many stakeholders whom we have recognized throughout the talk in the House today. The Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society has been involved in this, as have other non-governmental organizations. Many of them need to be commended for getting the legislation under the previous government through Parliament. Now we are working on improving that, and making some improvements to the park.

We also heard about the importance that this area plays as a green space in southwestern Ontario. The Rouge River watershed is located within the park. It is the healthiest river running through the Toronto area. There are agricultural activities that date back to the 1700s. The legislation recognizes the importance of that agricultural tradition within this unique protected area. There are many places of interest, visitor facilities, and recreational opportunities.

What I was drawn to is the biodiversity. There are 726 plant species, with six of them being nationally rare, and 92 being regionally rare. There are 225 bird species, with five nationally rare breeding birds and four breeding birds of concern. There are 55 fish species within the park area, including two vulnerable species. There are 27 mammal species, and 19 reptile and amphibian species. There is great biological diversity. There are also 1,700 species of plants and animals that have been identified, including 23 species at risk. Therefore, the creation and further protection of the park is going to be a great thing for protected areas.

Within the greater Toronto area, this is the first-ever urban national park that will protect nature, culture, and agriculture. That is an exciting variation on what we tend to think of as national parks within the protected areas realm. When finished, it will be the largest and best protected urban park of its kind in the world.

There are elements being looked at today, which we talked about, and that I am going to speak on next, and they are ensuring that ecological integrity is the first priority in the management of the park.

On ecological integrity, I am going to start with a definition, just so everyone knows what we are talking about. The bill states:

Ecological integrity means, with respect to the Park, a condition that is determined to be characteristic of its natural region and likely to persist, including abiotic components and the composition and abundance of native species and biological communities, rates of change and supporting processes.

This is important. There are two additional elements in the legislation that are going to be looked at. First, under “Factors to be considered”, it states:

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

● (1300)

Second, it says, “For greater certainty, [the subsection] does not prevent the carrying out of agricultural activities as provided for in this Act”, so it recognizes that agriculture is a historic activity that will continue into the foreseeable future.

I would like to talk a bit about ecological integrity. The members opposite on the Conservative side have raised concerns about this. As someone who has worked in the national parks system for decades and has seen ecological integrity brought into the discussion and into the National Parks Act during my career, I find it is a really useful management tool.

I have spoken about the richness of the biodiversity that is found in this area. By putting ecological integrity first, the bill is saying that this is something to which Parks Canada staff and stakeholders need to pay attention. There are biospecies that are at risk and may need support and management decisions to make sure that they continue. At no point does this mean that ecological integrity would preclude visitor use. So it is a positive way of making sure that we are able to put the processes and management structures in place to make sure that the biodiversity continues, that it will support our targets, hopefully as protected areas within Canada; and yet it still recognizes the unique area as a national urban park. It recognizes that there are going to be pressures that more remote parks do not face, but it says that we are able to face the issues that pose challenges to the future of this very diverse and rich area. This inclusion is critical to strengthening the legislation and ensuring that Rouge National Urban Park is poised to continue and play an important role into the future.

I am also going to note that Bill C-18, which is before us, would add land to the park. We would see a nice piece of land in four parcels being brought into the protected area, and work is continuing with the Province of Ontario so we would see additional lands in the future. Again, that all helps as we strive as a country to meet our action targets related to protection of our diverse habitats in Canada.

Government Orders

Through this legislation, we are also looking at amending section 21 of the Parks Canada Agency Act. This would allow the new parks and historic sites account to be used for existing protected heritage sites that have attained full operational status. Prior to this proposed change under Bill C-18 coming forward, there were funds that were available from the Government of Canada for the establishment of parks, and that is great when setting up a new park. However, in many cases opportunities arise, as we are seeing with Rouge National Urban Park, in which there are discussions about lands that may be acquired. We also see it with other parks that have reached operational status, and I will use an example of an area that I worked in, Gulf Island National Park Reserve, where the park does not have the land base to achieve full protection of the ecological systems that it represents. So this proposed change under the Parks Canada Agency Act allowing the funds to be used for expansion of parks, adding lands to already-established sites, is a very positive step forward.

We also see that clause 5 amending part 2 of schedule 1 to the Canada National Parks Act would provide for the excision of lands in Wood Buffalo National Park and would see the creation of the Garden River Indian Reserve. I had the opportunity from 1986 to 1991 to work in Wood Buffalo National Park, and I see this as a very important part of our government's commitment to reconciliation. It is respecting the long-standing rights of the nation, so this is a very positive move, and I am glad to see that it is included in Bill C-18.

With that, I will conclude my comments just by noting that this is a very important piece of legislation for continuing to ensure that we have protected spaces, and that Rouge National Urban Park would have its ecological integrity managed as its first consideration. The bill is dealing with expansion of other systems, making that easier through access to funds, and it is dealing with the Wood Buffalo National Park reserve issue for the Garden River Indian Reserve.

As my colleague did, I would also like to remind all Canadians that our Canada 150 celebrations next year in 2017 will see free admission to all Parks Canada properties, including national parks, national historic sites, and marine conservation areas. So I invite them to please take advantage of this opportunity, visit our parks, and love them dearly. I invite all Canadians. I will see them in 2017.

● (1305)

Mr. Mel Arnold (North Okanagan—Shuswap, CPC): Madam Speaker, I appreciate the speech from the member and, in fact, all of the speeches today in support of national parks.

My question for the member is this. How would they interpret the ecological integrity phrase in an urban park that is in the middle of the city and that has had farming activity for over 200 years? How would you phrase or define that ecological security?

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): I just want to remind the member to address the questions to the House. I would just say, try to refrain from using the word “you”, and it will make life a lot simpler.

Mr. John Aldag: Madam Speaker, as I mentioned, I worked in Parks Canada for over three decades and have really good first-hand experience with the application of this idea from the National Parks Act that ecological integrity needs to be the primary consideration in the management of protected areas.

I do not see that it is going to present any problems whatsoever in the management of an urban national park. Certainly there are challenges that are different from those in some of the more remote and northern parks, but the reality is that there is a rich amount of biodiversity within the Rouge National Urban Park. It will help managers, when they are making decisions, to look at what is in the interests of protecting and enriching the habitats that are represented.

I was looking through a sheet today that actually talked about the fact that there have been more than 31 actions taken by Parks Canada to do things like establishing new wetlands and improving the health of the wetlands, stream beds, and riparian areas. All these things can be done, and they will be guided by this idea of ecological integrity as a primary management decision. That is positive. It will make sure that it is protected green space. It does not preclude other uses, such as the agricultural uses that are recognized in this legislation. It will not preclude visitor use and enjoyment of the space. I think it works very well with what is happening.

Ms. Linda Duncan (Edmonton Strathcona, NDP): Madam Speaker, I would like to thank the member for his speech and for his long-term dedication to Parks Canada.

I noted that the member mentioned Grasslands National Park, where he worked. I have had the honour of visiting that site. I was travelling with biologist friends, and we were delighted that Parks Canada was then starting to hire biologists and plant specialists, because that is what is special about Grasslands, in trying to recover the species.

I also wanted to share that my own brother was involved in the Rouge area many decades ago when they were shutting down the tanneries and coming up with a plan for the reforestation of the area. Even though we live in Alberta now, we can appreciate efforts across the country.

I wonder if the member could speak to this issue that a number of the Conservative members keep raising. They seem to think that it is impossible for any kind of national park, including an urban national park, to actually recognize agricultural value for protecting species. I have conservation friends in southern Alberta who specifically bought grazing lands so they could show how they could raise cattle and build up biodiversity.

● (1310)

Mr. John Aldag: Madam Speaker, that was an excellent question. I would also like to acknowledge the work that the member has done on the environmental front throughout her career and continues to do as a member of our environment committee.

On the question of agriculture and biodiversity, I do not see them being mutually exclusive. In fact, we have seen great examples in this country of landowners being stewards and managing their lands for the ongoing conservation of biodiversity. Agriculture is not exclusive of good land management; in fact, it supports good land management in many cases.

Government Orders

I am concerned with the position of the Conservatives. They seem to be saying that somehow this is going to harm the management of the national urban park. I just think that is a completely false premise. We can actually have ecological integrity and agriculture, as we have in this legislation, and we can see the continuation of biodiversity within an urban national park.

Hon. Peter Van Loan (York—Simcoe, CPC): Madam Speaker, I am delighted to speak to the subject of the Rouge National Urban Park, because this is a park that I was pleased to see our government get established. As the former House leader, I had some challenges in getting the legislation through because the Liberals were resisting it, and I will say a bit more about that in a short period of time.

It was a tremendous accomplishment by the folks at Parks Canada and by many people in the community who worked in alliances over many years to make it happen. Those efforts to establish this national park, believe it or not, can trace their roots to the Mulroney government era, when one of our predecessor parliamentarians, the Hon. Pauline Browes, was a member. She played a considerable role as the member for Scarborough Centre in beginning to champion this issue. I can say, as someone who was active in politics in the Progressive Conservative Party in that day and age, that she was a force to behold as she went hither and yon, from person to person, lobbying and setting the agenda and saying that this was an important priority, that the Rouge Valley was a natural gem, that it was important to protect it, and all kinds of efforts had to be made, and the objective should be to have a national park established there, the first national urban park. Her work, along with that of many others in the community, continued for many years. Even after she left this chamber in 1993, her work continued in the community, as it did with so many other volunteers, so many folks from different organizations who cared about it.

That work made slower progress under the Chrétien government, but when we once again had a Conservative government, there was a good solid ear to the notion to establish this park. I was so pleased that the work was able to come to fruition, notwithstanding that the bill was filibustered, delayed, and obstructed by the Liberals as much as they could, as some members may remember. It was necessary, unfortunately, for us to use time allocation to get it through and adopted, but we were able to do that and get the park established.

However, as I said, there were some problems. Some political games were played. The Liberal government at Queen's Park, which I thought had more than its fair share of troubles and did not need to go looking for trouble, did go looking for trouble and created the basis for that delay and obstruction by its Liberal friends in Ottawa. It was fairly transparently understood by most people in the GTA and that was reflected in polling. They wanted to see the park, and they saw it as an effort to simply keep it from happening under the Conservative watch.

The argument was the notion of ecological integrity needing to be the guiding principle. I will remind members that the development of the park, the process, goes back to the 1980s and carried forward into the 2000s. We are talking about almost three decades of work. To throw out that three decades of work—including the agreement that existed between the province and the federal government—with this sudden curve ball at the end was objected to by many of the

stakeholders who were an important part of developing the balance. It was unconstructive and unhelpful.

The provincial government went so far as to try to seek some kind of compensation before it would put its lands into it. It wanted to see all of the rules rewritten. It wanted standards that were higher than the ones it already applied to the regional park that it took care of there. It was an unusual circumstance, but the political motivation was transparent and understood by all. I was pleased that we succeeded and got through it. This legislation exists to provide a bit of cover for that kind of shameful piece of history on the part of the Liberal Party and what it did.

Where does this come from? Why do we even have this land in the first place? It actually goes back to another unusual chapter in big government liberalism back in the Trudeau area when lands were assembled for a Pickering airport that was apparently urgently required. The government expropriated the land for the purpose of this airport, all kinds of farmland, thousands of acres of high-value, high-productive, prime farmland in what is now the greater Toronto area, in Durham region primarily and a bit in York region. It was devastating to the local economy. The uncertainty continues to have an impact in that local economy.

•(1315)

The chair of Durham region would always point out the differences with Peel region, where there were highways hither and yon in every direction, but all they had in Durham region was a whole bunch of frozen land and the inability to do anything, an inability to have any kind of economic activity take place. It was a great source of frustration to the municipalities, it was a great source of frustration to the residents, but no greater frustration than to those farmers who lost farms which had, in many cases, been in families for many decades. They were productive, good, and valuable farms.

How egregious was this kind of high-authoritarian approach of the Liberal government at the time in establishing it? Well, we can look at Mirabel, the Montreal example where the government actually went so far as to shut down that airport. Those land issues still remain a sensitivity. Here we are talking decades later, almost half a century later, and there is still no airport even built.

The government got to the stage where it understood the amount of land was so much more, so it just protected the stuff it would need if there actually was an airport built. A footprint was established and lo and behold, thousands of acres extra was available, which had been taken from farmers. It was then rented to the farmers who were willing to do it on a yearly lease; a year-to-year uncertain situation. Anybody who is involved in agriculture knows that it is not a good way to farm. One is not necessarily a good steward of the land if one might be kicked out the next year. There is no great incentive to make the kinds of investments that farmers make to the land they own themselves.

I know that those who do not understand farming do not understand the concept of how one invests in the land, but those are very real things to people who farm the land in this day and age, and I will say a little bit more about that.

Government Orders

In any event, the government concluded that there was an opportunity to do this, and that became part of the federal government's contribution, starting, as I said, back in the Pauline Browes championing era: Let us get this federal land contributed, let us get the provincial land that it had also put together in the area, as well as some municipal contribution to create this wonderful urban park. This is how we got to where we were, and the park was being established. Then along came this curve, and it is now being dealt with through the bill before us, of the notion that ecological integrity must be made the guiding principle for all decisions regarding the management of the park.

It sounds really good. If I were to think of a national park, I would say that, yes, ecological integrity should be a pretty important consideration. However, should it be the overriding and guiding principle? Well, when we start getting into the case of an urban park, things are little bit different.

Let us not make a mistake. This is not Central Park. It is not surrounded by high-rises on four sides. This park is kind of at the urban fringe in areas. There are parts of the park that are going to be a little more surrounded by urban development, but as I said, parts of it are farmland and surrounded by farmland. However, we see a whole range of activities. Going through it are things like major highway corridors, pipelines, transmission lines, and so on.

Therefore, if a new pipeline is to be established, is that going to run into trouble there? If the 401 and 407 have to be expanded at some point in the future, is that going to violate the ecological integrity? Members can bet their boots it will.

Are we putting ourselves into a straitjacket that will continue the punishment of this part of the greater Toronto area through its inability to grow, and to deal with the normal contingencies of urban development, population growth, and economic development that occur? Are we going to put it in that economic straitjacket? I think that is one of the concerns.

I am going to focus on that one activity that I was talking about so much, which is farming and farmland.

To those who are saying not to worry about this consideration, farmland is protected, they are quite right. In the establishment of the original park, farming was a protected activity. That was part of the careful negotiated balance between all the interests. There were some farmers who did not even want it, but people were pragmatic and flexible. They were willing to give and take, and they came to the give-and-take on the understanding that farming would be a protected activity and ecological integrity would not be the overriding principle.

Why is it a concern to a farmer on their land if the overriding principle on their land is ecological integrity?

Guess what? The simple act of plowing land is not respecting the ecological integrity. The normal process of agriculture is aimed at protecting the crop a farmer is growing, and we are just talking about cash crop and not other agricultural activities. The normal approach is that of eliminating competition for resources, such as competition from other plants, which farmers would call weeds, and competition from pests, such as insects and other animals that are going to consume a crop.

● (1320)

That is the normal ecological process for those weeds to go in. Would the spraying of a pesticide or even something a bit more benign like the use of Roundup as a fairly low-impact herbicide something that would be prohibited because it is interfering with the ecological integrity? Members can tell me that their opinion is no, but what would happen if an activist group starts taking farmers to court to challenge their ability to do this on the basis of a law that states that ecological integrity is the primary principle, and that means they cannot use Roundup on their land in their agricultural activity because it would interfere with that? We might say there is no need to worry because they would win the case. However, where would farmers get the money to fight the case to defend themselves against these activists who would try to assert this ecological integrity principle? It is not even land that the farmers own but land they are renting from year to year.

In the olden days, farmers would grow hedgerows and have fences because they had a lot of livestock, and so on. This land is now largely out of livestock and mainly cash crop. Now the normal practice is the removal of hedgerows. Ecological integrity would mean leaving those things alone and letting them expand to eat up the agricultural land. If they cut trees and seedlings at the edge of the field, are they violating that ecological integrity?

If farmers create driveways or pathways for agricultural equipment between adjoining fields because they have rented another one, are they violating that ecological integrity principle and, lo and behold, could face some private lawsuit asserting that they have broken this law in the National Parks Act, and have to defend themselves against that?

These are the kinds of things that farmers are quite legitimately concerned about. I could use all kinds of other examples, such as tile drainage or any kind of alteration of the land to ensure drainage. In the normal process, farmers who farm in an area with clay soil, as we find here, notice from time to time that through their plowing they have altered the grading a bit and have water pooling in their fields. They need to grade them to restore drainage to prevent it from happening again. Would that be objected to? Would farmers be forced to have their hands tied and lose all of their crops in a wet field condition in a wet year? I am quite sure that they would not be allowed to put in tile drainage as that is something that ecological integrity would dictate is not allowed.

Even if we changed it from yearly leases to giving farmers greater certainty and perhaps 10-year leases or something that would make it worthwhile to make that kind of investment, they would think twice or might not do it at all simply because of the fear that this would hurt them.

Government Orders

Let us suppose that farmers want to change what they grow, or even grow what they do now. Would they face activists who do not like genetically modified organisms or who do not like the use of genetics to produce better products? There are some in this House who feel that way. Would they suddenly get active and say, "If you're farming in this area where ecological integrity is the main principle, can you use some kind of new genetically modified crop, a new soybean or corn, that can resist a certain pest?" No, they cannot use it because that is not respecting ecological integrity. That is what the argument would be. These are the risks that farmers would face.

We can say offhandedly, "Don't worry, everything is going to be fine because the parks administrators will make sensible decisions", and I do not doubt that as good, professional public servants they would make reasonable decisions because that is what we see happen, but we know that they are not the only players in the world out there. When we are talking about this park in particular and some of the players who have been involved on this issue of asserting this, we have some fairly aggressive folks willing to spend resources to assert their objective of ecological integrity. There are some people who think that what that means is achieving an end condition that is the prior condition, before we had European settlement here, meaning a Carolinian forest throughout this area. That is a wonderful idea, but there is no way that the transformation of this to a Carolinian forest can be considered consistent with protecting the rights of those farmers to continue their activities.

● (1325)

I say with respect that it is not a foregone conclusion that making ecological integrity a guiding principle will not hurt people. Other people talk about letting forest fires continue. I have talked about things like road widenings, or changes to putting guardrails along a road with a steep grade. Will that violate the ecological integrity, because if we put in a guardrail, are we suddenly keeping the deer or other wildlife from their normal migration route or travel route? Are we reducing the connectivity that the environmentalists say is so important as part of the ecological integrity? That is a life safety issue. Are we doing that, and putting those lives at risk by making that kind of activity?

When we are doing an urban park we have to do something different from when we are doing something like Nahanni National Park. We have people. We have economic activity. We have the agriculture I talked about, roads, all kinds of stuff going on. All of these things have to be taken into account, and I think that was the genius of the work of the Conservative government in this case, a couple of ministers of the environment and going, as I say, all the way back to the initial efforts of Pauline Browes to make this park happen. It was a genius that took into account all those stakeholders, all those different circumstances, the real challenges of an urban park, and tried to create a framework that respected that this is indeed different.

In fact, I can say, as House leader, as we were shepherding the legislation, we got it in later than I wanted because of some of the efforts to create an entirely separate category with separate criteria. The imposition through this amendment of ecological integrity, designed to create some patina of legitimacy for the obstruction and delay efforts and the kind of juvenile behaviour from the Ontario Liberal government on this over the past couple of years, is putting

at risk all of that hard work of so many people and so many stakeholders, and, I think, creating a lot of unnecessary uncertainty.

I can simply conclude by saying that the Rouge National Urban Park is a tremendous accomplishment, something we are very proud of. Is this amendment a meaningful step forward? If it gets the Liberal government to co-operate and finally make the contribution that they were originally obligated to in terms of lands that would become part of this park, I suppose that is a gain. My concern is the price that is being paid for that gain, a largely symbolic one for those people with little consideration of the real consequences as a potentially, significantly negative impact.

I just want to conclude once again by going back to talk about Pauline Browes. She continues to be active on this issue. When we were dealing with it in the previous Parliament, she was right there, continually making calls, continually shepherding the process, continually making efforts to see that it would happen. I think that is a lesson to all of us about what it means to be a member of Parliament and have some kind of legacy, pick up a cause and continue with it, even after a member leaves this place, but using the wisdom they have, the knowledge they have and quite frankly the networks they have developed to continue to pursue that issue and achieve it for the sake of the public good. Doing something like this, a national urban park, has never been done before in a place where a lot of people have different ideas about what could be done. That is a pretty challenging thing to do.

Of course, in the case of government doing anything, it is often much easier to not do anything than to do something, but it was the persistence of the efforts of the Hon. Pauline Browes over all those years that got us to the point where we are today where we have the Rouge National Urban Park. I just want to pay tribute to her and all her work over those many decades of her public service as a member of Parliament and her time since. I hope the record will show that the role she played was very significant. I hope that the public will keep that name prominently in their minds as they reflect on this tremendous jewel, the asset that was created during our previous Parliament of the Rouge National Urban Park.

● (1330)

Mr. Gary Anandasangaree (Scarborough—Rouge Park, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I certainly share with the member our deepest appreciation of Pauline Browes, who is a Scarborough stalwart. The member for Scarborough—Guildwood also mentioned her in his statement and gave her due credit for bringing us to this point. She was a very important player in this whole process.

I disagree with the assertion that the previous government was a genius when it developed the previous legislation. We are consulting the local community. As the member for Scarborough—Rouge Park, I have had the opportunity to meet with dozens of stakeholders, from environmental groups, to farmers, to community organizations, to schools. One thing has been very clear. Ecological integrity is not something people want to compromise on.

If he were to speak to the farmers today, I can assure him that they are happy today, because the Minister of Environment and the Minister of Health reached out and had extensive discussions with the farmers. What we have today is an element of certainty for the farmers. They have up to 30 years to continue their practice.

Government Orders

We put ecological integrity front and centre, as we should, in developing a new park, and in fact, a new park system, in an urban setting.

I would like to ask the member if he had a chance to speak to farmers directly. The message we are getting is quite clear. They are quite satisfied with what we are going forward with.

Hon. Peter Van Loan: Madam Speaker, it just so happens that my wife's family has roots in this area as farmers, so yes, I am often at social gatherings where the subject comes up. I will take those discussions as evidence that the concerns I laid out are in fact very real.

I take my own experience. As some members know, I am on a farm. I understand what agriculture is about. My grandfather was an agronomist. I know that some folks in Scarborough, and a lot of folks in this House, have moved away from that tradition of understanding farming. Even if someone farmed 50 years ago, the farming of today is incredibly different.

We talk about things like ecological integrity and slide a straitjacket over it. There are, in land use planning, lawful non-conforming uses.

The hon. member is absolutely right. The farmers are happier with the prospect of longer terms. That is something we thought was very important and would be a potentially positive outcome of establishing this park. We thought it was a huge priority to go in that direction. That is welcome, but we cannot say that we are going to give them this and they can hope for the best on the other stuff. If we can get rid of the other stuff, it is a problem. Why create the problem? I do not see the need for it.

They say that it is so important to have ecological integrity as the primary principle. Do not worry, we are told, it is not going to harm anything in farming. Farmers can do anything they want, and forget ecological integrity; it is not going to apply there. They did not say that. There is nothing that says that ecological integrity is the overriding principle except that it does not apply to agriculture and that agriculture is allowed to go on developing as agriculture should. The fact is, it is interfering with it. The whole nature of agriculture is a change in nature by human activity. That is what it is. There is a real risk there.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Christine Moore (Abitibi—Témiscamingue, NDP): Madam Speaker, this is an issue we have talked about many times in other Parliaments.

My colleague is a long-time member of Parliament. Does he think that the government's bill takes all of the discussions we have already had about this issue into account?

• (1335)

[*English*]

Hon. Peter Van Loan: Madam Speaker, that is an interesting question. I thought the bill that was presented in the previous Parliament actually effectively captured it. In fact, there was a belt-and-suspenders approach to dealing with all the issues that resulted in it coming to the House later than I was comfortable with. I think we lost about a year in our efforts to make sure that it was watertight

and that there were no undue consequences that would hurt the urban park or other national parks by creating this separate and special category we did for it legislatively. That was something asserted very strongly by the Parks Canada officials, to the frustration of some of the political folks who would have liked things to move faster, but it was done.

We had arrived at the right place, absolutely. We had addressed all the issues that were of concern. Now, for the sake of something flashy that looks good and sounds good, we are putting at risk some practical, balanced solutions that had been arrived at. That is my concern.

Hon. Michelle Rempel (Calgary Nose Hill, CPC): Madam Speaker, my colleague raised the issue of ecological integrity. There is a broader concern I have when we are looking at balancing ecological integrity with visitor experience when we approach Parks Canada's management plans and how they are implemented on a day-to-day basis.

We know that Canada's brand is nature. When we look at how Canadians interact with our natural spaces and how we attract tourism, certainly having access to Canada's parks and ensuring that people can actually experience them is something I think should be prioritized and not shunted to the side when we are looking at a parks management plan.

In fact, one of the former executive directors of Parks Canada said:

...we will only be successful in safeguarding our national parks and national historic sites for future generations if Canada's heritage places are relevant to Canadians. Relevance is stronger when Canadians are presented with opportunities to use and enjoy our parks

I am just wondering if my colleague could comment on the importance of accessibility and ensuring that we are not putting ecological integrity at the forefront at the exclusion of Canadians' ability to enjoy and use our national parks and heritage sites.

Hon. Peter Van Loan: Madam Speaker, the point the member raises is a very strong one and one I had not come close enough to addressing. I think it is valid.

We have Banff National Park. It is a bit more than an hour away from Calgary. There are huge pressures on it in terms of use. When people think of Canada's national parks, they think of it as the first one and as the most dramatic and successful one. Issues about use always come up there and at related parks through the Rockies.

Here we are talking about an urban park. There is a population in the many millions well within less than an hour's drive, which we presumably want to encourage to come to use it. We need to actually create, build, and establish the means for using it. Is ecological integrity going to be an impediment to creating the kinds of attractions, interpretation centres, trails, and other kinds of activities people would like to see and use in a national park? I think that is a legitimate concern and is something I have not heard addressed very well today.

Mr. Gary Anandasangaree: Madam Speaker, I am having a hard time understanding why our friends opposite are rejecting the issue of ecological integrity. It is a very important issue that science has recognized as essential.

Government Orders

The park is not about using it for ourselves in this generation alone. A park is an intergenerational asset, an asset we are going to leave to our children and grandchildren, and so on.

I had a chance this fall to visit Central Park with my family. We had a fantastic time. We were able to enjoy the nature, because it was preserved. It was preserved in the busiest city in the world.

I do not understand why our friends across the aisle are rejecting the issue of ecological integrity and why they are so shortsighted in making sure that we protect this for the future.

● (1340)

Hon. Peter Van Loan: Madam Speaker, the hon. member made my case better than I could make it myself.

Central Park, as an urban park, is not a natural park. It is not a park of ecological integrity. It is a park that has been reshaped and built by man. The features in it are man-made. The paths in it are man-made. The attractions that the people who visit it every day use are man-made. They are all things that are not part of the natural condition of that land before it was developed by human beings to be a park.

None of it, which he says is an absolute gem, would be permitted if ecological integrity was the overriding principle. It is an important principle. We think it is important to have it there. It is one of the most important factors. However, should it override every other consideration of human use and agricultural use, such as roads, pipelines, and human safety? No.

Mr. Blake Richards (Banff—Airdrie, CPC): Madam Speaker, it is a pleasure to rise to speak to this bill today. Obviously, it is no surprise to anyone, based on my constant promotion of it but also because Banff National Park is in my riding, that I am one of the proudest promoters and supporters of our national parks system. I am certainly pleased to have seen, through the work of the previous government and others, that Rouge National Urban Park, Canada's first urban national park, would provide opportunities for people in the GTA to experience our national parks by having one in such close proximity. I hope they catch the bug and want to experience our other national parks. What better place than the first and greatest national park in our country, Banff National Park? I certainly believe it will be a great promoter of that.

In fact, I know that the previous superintendent of Banff National Park has moved into Rouge and has become the superintendent there. She has brought that great experience from Banff with her to that job. We congratulate Pam Veinotte.

Because I am an opposition member, people would say my job is to oppose. I would disagree with that slightly. I would say it means that my job is to try to ensure that we give the government the opportunity to improve and we show it ways to accomplish better things. The minute the government members choose not to pick those up, we can show them to Canadians and they can choose something that will be better. If all else fails, our job is to oppose.

In that vein, I want to point out the area of concern I have with this bill. I will spend some time on why that should be a concern and offer an opportunity to the government members to do better.

The section I am concerned about is about ecological integrity. It says that it must be of the utmost importance, above all the other important parts of Parks Canada's mandate. Parks Canada's mandate is obviously to promote ecological integrity, but it is also to promote visitor experience and visitor opportunities. Those things are important, and they all go together.

When part of a bill says, "Maintenance or restoration of ecological integrity...must be the first priority of the Minister when considering all aspects of the management of the Park", it indicates that the Liberals have the intention of making that part of the mandate the prime focus. That would mean forgetting about the fact that parks are there for enjoyment and use. People will point out, and I would be the first among them, that it is important that enjoyment and use be there for both current and future generations. That is part of the reason ecological integrity is important, but we have to be clear that those things have to be done in unison. They have to be considered as a package. It cannot be the first and only priority, because without the opportunity for people to enjoy parks, they are not able to meet their fullest use.

I recently attended a speech given by Rex Murphy, in Banff, at the annual gala for the Association for Mountain Parks Protection & Enjoyment. I am going to speak about the association in a bit, because it has a great role to play in ensuring that this balance is there. Its members have some great suggestions. That is what I will offer to the government in terms of suggestions.

● (1345)

Rex Murphy made a great speech on the importance of parks. I will paraphrase all of his speech into one short comment. Essentially, his point was that parks needed people as much as people needed parks. There is no question about both of those statements. People do need parks. It is where we can reconnect with nature, spend time with our families, enjoy the great outdoors, and discover part of our souls sometimes. We get so busy with day-to-day life that we sometimes forget to reconnect with ourselves. Through nature, we can find those opportunities.

However, it is also important for parks to have people. Without people to enjoy them, they are not serving their greatest purpose. That is why it is so important to find that balance.

I want to delve into the last time we heard these kinds of statements. Coincidentally enough, it was the last time there was a Liberal government. That was back in the 1990s. In 1994, the minister responsible for Parks Canada was Sheila Copps. If one were to say that name in Banff National Park today, people still curl up into a fetal position. They wonder what is coming next, how they are going to be hit, how the tourism industry is going to be damaged next. It was all based on this same principle.

Government Orders

This is a movie that people in Banff have seen before, and they do not like the way that it ends. In the last year of the Liberal government, they are seeing the start of a sequel. It looks very much like the original movie and they are quite concerned about the ending, whether it will be the same as last time. There are all kinds of signs that this might be the case. I want to give the government the opportunity to hear some of those concerns today. Maybe it will take up some of those concerns and see if there are ways it can do better and improve. That is certainly my hope.

When we look back at when Sheila Copps was the Liberal minister, the Banff-Bow Valley Study was undertaken. It provided a whole series of recommendations, not all of which were taken up but certainly many were. At that time, we could not be in Banff without hearing about this topic. It was on the minds of everybody. People were definitely concerned. I will talk about some of the issues raised at that time.

It significantly delayed a number of projects proceeding, things that would have helped to improve the visitor experience, for tourism to flourish, for visitors to best enjoy the area, things like improvements to ski hills. The biggest was the twinning of the Trans-Canada Highway between Castle Junction and Sunshine, something the Conservative government put in place. The twinning of that highway was completed, which is so vitally important for human and wildlife safety.

The Conservatives were able to accomplish this because of our balanced approach in ensuring all of the different parts of the mandate, but at that time, it was on hold. Unfortunately it took deaths along the highway for the Liberal Party to wake up. The Conservatives, once in office, were able to finish that project.

When people look back at that time and the concerns that developed as a result of the sole focus in this bill, being only on the ecological integrity and not about the experiences and enjoyment of visitors, I think about all the things that were accomplished by the Conservative government in its 10 years. I wonder if any of those things could be accomplished today with this kind of move.

● (1350)

Most important to mention is the Legacy Trail, which is a multi-use trail but mainly a cycling trail that leads from Canmore to Banff. This is an incredibly popular trail. When the government talks about limiting development in national parks, I wonder if this would have been able to proceed. I suppose one of the answers might be in the fact that last summer, prior to the election, there was an announcement of a lot of great projects that were warmly received by the people of Banff and by the visitors who experienced Banff. One was the ability to build and widen the shoulders on the Bull Valley Parkway, which goes between Banff and Lake Louise. Cyclists would have a safer route to follow from Banff to Lake Louise. When the Liberal government took office, it cancelled that project. Cyclists, who were greatly pleased about their improved safety, lost that opportunity. Those are the kinds of things we are seeing.

With my remaining time, I want to discuss the biggest issue on the minds of those in Banff right now, who are seeking to make their livelihoods through tourism. I should point out for all members of the House, because some might not be aware. For Banff, tourism is

the economy. It is not a part of the economy. It is not even a large part of the economy. It is the economy of Banff. Tourism is what employs almost everybody in that community. It creates hundreds of businesses for people in that area, allowing them to thrive and succeed. It enables the approximately four million visitors who are received in Banff each year to have the greatest experiences they can have.

Tourists of course go to Banff to enjoy the national park, but we have to provide them with the experiences, the lodging, the places to eat, and all of the other opportunities that a guest looks to see in a tourism experience. That is what the people of Banff do. That is the livelihood of the entire community. When we are talking about things that will lessen the ability to develop, or improve their products or their offerings because of their leaseholds, we are talking about harming their opportunities to make a livelihood and the ability of visitors to have a great experience. I have great faith in the people, the business owners, and the employees who serve our tourists. I have no doubt that tourists will continue to have those great experiences no matter what the Liberal government does.

However, I will point out that there are some concerns right now in the ability to take in vehicle traffic. The mayor of Banff, and I spoke to her as recently as today, has concerns about the capacity for vehicle traffic and the need for solutions. I am going to quote some of the mayor's concerns. Banff is welcoming and open to more visitors, but the capacity for vehicle traffic is a concern. The mayor has raised some of these concerns on behalf of the people. At a council meeting in October, she said:

I am deeply disappointed that Parks Canada has not come to the table on offering ideas in partnership with us to manage this high probability of increases in traffic in 2017....At the end of the day...The world heritage site and Banff National Park are the draw and we are here to service those visitors...I get asked consistently, a few times every week, by residents about what's going to happen in the summer of 2017 with free entry to all national parks, including Banff... I'm very concerned.

She goes on to say that the offer made by the Liberal government of free entry is a nice idea, and it is. However, no thought seems to have been given to the real logistics of managing the increased traffic, particularly for the popular parks like Banff and Jasper. She said that:

When this was announced, I guess I assumed that Parks Canada would be working with us on how to manage the consequences of this, and I was assuming that would happen very quickly.

● (1355)

It is nearly the end of November, and we still have a real concern about what those plans are going to be for next year.

I want to talk a little about some of the solutions that are being offered, and I know there is not a lot of time left. I want to talk about the group I mentioned earlier, the Association for Mountain Parks Protection and Enjoyment. The group advocates for what is really the mandate of Parks Canada to ensure that this balance is found, the balance I talked about earlier.

It wants to ensure there is ecological integrity, but it is there for visitor experience and for those of current and future generations, and that we can provide that quality tourism experience. When it talks about solutions, it is a group that needs to be listened to. It talks about some of the issues that we are facing them right now, and offers these following solutions.

Statements by Members

The group believes there is a need for things like mass transit solutions that are in line with its environmentally responsible visitor experience. It is talking about bicycle trails to reduce vehicles and to provide environmentally friendly access. It is talking about ensuring sustainable development, engaging guests with an enhanced visitor experience, new opportunities to connect new Canadians, and those with limited mobility.

Those are the kinds of solutions being asked for and what we hear instead is a government that says that it will limit all development and put this one pillar as the only consideration. Unfortunately, that creates a situation where those who want to come, visit and experience cannot. Solutions are being put out there, and we are just not hearing anything back. We are not hearing any take-up. We are not hearing any concern about trying to provide those kinds of solutions and opportunities.

When solutions or opportunities are not offered, then we have a situation where the park will be at a capacity for vehicle traffic. Then it will come into the kinds of problems that are difficult to solve without some help and co-operation from the government and Parks Canada. I know I have had great interactions with Parks Canada, both at the CEO level and also at the local level, with our local superintendent and others. I believe they are eager to try to work with the tourism industry.

The government needs to have the political will to push those solutions forward so we can continue to best serve the four million guests, and likely far more next year with the free park passes. However, without the ability to deal with some of the new solutions that are needed to ensure proper vehicle access, we will actually have a really difficult time to best provide that experience for visitors.

As I said, I have great faith in the people and tourism operators of Banff. I know they will do that, but it would certainly be good if the government came to table to try to help ensure better opportunities in those regards.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): The member will have a minute and a half for his speech the next time the debate continues, and 10 minutes for questions and comments.

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

• (1400)

[*Translation*]

SPRUCE BUDWORM

Mrs. Marilène Gill (Manicouagan, BQ): Madam Speaker, Quebec's forests, like those across eastern Canada, are grappling with an insect that is threatening our industry: the spruce budworm.

In 2014, the federal government allocated \$18 million over four years to fight the budworm. It allocated \$12 million to New Brunswick and half that amount, \$6 million, to Quebec. Not only is that not enough, it is unfair. Quebec has more infested forests than New Brunswick has forests, period, and in Quebec, the infestation is spreading at a rate of one million hectares per year.

Stack that up against what happened in western Canada, and it looks even worse. The federal government handed British Columbia

\$225 million when it was facing a similar infestation. That is typical of the federal government's attitude toward the regions: out of sight, out of mind, and left out in the cold.

Quebec has 60,000 people in the forestry sector. The Bloc Québécois will not fail them.

* * *

[*English*]

THE ENVIRONMENT

Hon. Larry Bagnell (Yukon, Lib.): Madam Speaker,

[*Member spoke in Gwich'in*]

[*English*]

The lifeblood, the spiritual survival, the culture, the food, and the clothes of the Gwich'in people of the Yukon, the Northwest Territories, and Alaska, for eons, has been integrally connected to the porcupine caribou herd. It is their soul. The herd migrates annually between Canada and the United States, which jointly manage it. Interrupting the most sensitive stage of the life cycle of these caribou and their calving on the 1002 lands of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge, ANWR, could lead to their extinction, and the end of a way of life of the Gwich'in people. This herd could be devastated to extinction by potential oil and gas drilling in ANWR, now being discussed in the United States.

Therefore, I call upon all parliamentarians, and indeed all Canadians, to do whatever they can to preserve this iconic Canadian heritage and treasure, and the lifeline at the heart of the Gwich'in people. *Mahsi'Choo, Gunalchéesh*

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FORT WILLOW

Mr. Alexander Nuttall (Barrie—Springwater—Oro-Medonte, CPC): Madam Speaker, earlier this fall, Fort Willow was recognized as a national historic site. Fort Willow was a vital link in the supply chain connecting Lake Ontario with the upper Great Lakes. Since the conclusion of the War of 1812, the fort had fallen into severe disrepair and was threatened with being completely forgotten. That was until 1996, when a group of volunteers came together to rebuild and preserve the historic landmark.

The Friends of Fort Willow have since done a fantastic job of creating a highly educational and great cultural attraction. On behalf of the people of Barrie—Springwater—Oro-Medonte, I would like to congratulate Friends of Fort Willow on a job well done.

As well, I would like to pay my respects to the men and women of the War of 1812, who made our country the true north, strong and free.

*Statements by Members***JOHN NURANEY**

Mr. John Aldag (Cloverdale—Langley City, Lib.): Madam Speaker, on Monday my community of Cloverdale—Langley City lost a remarkable man. John Nuraneý was born in Kenya, before settling in Zaire. In 1974, John was forced to flee his adoptive country when the Zairean government nationalized his entire life's savings. A skilled businessman, John moved to Canada and quickly found success, operating several prominent local businesses. In 2001, he became the first person of Islamic faith to be elected to the British Columbia Legislative Assembly, holding office from 2001 to 2009.

For me, John was not just an admired figure, but a friend and a mentor, who was always a source of valuable wisdom, advice and fortitude. The sadness felt by John's loss will be felt by many people over many parts of the country.

I need not tell John's family, Gulshan, Nick, Asim and Naseem, that he was an incredible man. However, I hope they know how much he will be missed, by me and everyone who knew him.

I thank John for his service, guidance, and friendship. He will be missed.

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PENSIONS

Ms. Cheryl Hardcastle (Windsor—Tecumseh, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to express my profound disappointment with the Liberal government's unwillingness to fix its CPP enhancement legislation, Bill C-26, so that Canadians are not punished for being on a CPP disability pension or for taking time off to raise a child.

For reasons that are not entirely clear, so-called dropout provisions have not been included in Bill C-26. NDP amendments to fix this oversight were rejected by the government yesterday. These dropout provisions have been part of CPP since 1976. Essentially, the government is stacking on a layer, or tranche, to expand benefits. Women and people living with disabilities are going to be penalized because this new tranche will not have the same dropout provisions as the existing one.

These provisions have been excluded from the legislation, but we must not give up on other measures in the very near future to fix this injustice.

The minister must commit today to undertake due diligence and consult with each province and territory—

• (1405)

The Speaker: The hon. member for Sackville—Preston—Chezzetcook.

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NATHAN LLOYD SMITH

Mr. Darrell Samson (Sackville—Preston—Chezzetcook, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, on Remembrance Day, I attended a memorial service in my riding in honour of Private Nathan Lloyd Smith, who died in service to Canada on April 17, 2002, in Kandahar, Afghanistan, at the young age of 26.

Private Smith graduated from Eastern Shore District High School, and later with honours from Seneca College. He enrolled in the Canadian Armed Forces in 1998 and was assigned to the Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry 3rd Battalion.

[*Translation*]

He graduated at the top of his class at Battle School, in Wainwright, Alberta and received the Royal Canadian Legion Comradeship Award at the end of his basic training.

It was an honour for me to meet his parents, Lloyd and Charlotte Lynn Smith, and to thank them for their son's service and sacrifice.

[*English*]

Lest we forget.

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AEROSPACE INDUSTRY

Mr. James Bezan (Selkirk—Interlake—Eastman, CPC): Mr. Speaker, when the Prime Minister decided to exclude the F-35 from an open and fair competition, workers in Canada's aerospace industry were rightly alarmed. The Liberals' uninformed decision to sole source the obsolete Super Hornet has thrown the industry into a world of uncertainty. There is no region more concerned than my province of Manitoba.

The Prime Minister's politically driven decision has put thousands of high-skilled Canadian jobs at risk. There are more than 70 companies in Canada that are benefiting from over \$1 billion worth in contracts through the joint strike fighter program, and all are now in jeopardy.

Magellan Aerospace, in Winnipeg, has said that future work will become uncertain due to the Prime Minister's election promise. What is worse is that the Liberals did not properly consult.

Manitoba premier, Brian Pallister, raised concerns on the impact of the federal announcement on our province's aerospace industry, and criticized the lack of dialogue with local industry on the decision to sole source the Super Hornet.

On this side of the House, we are fighting for good-paying aerospace jobs in Winnipeg, and right across Canada. Why are the Liberal MPs in Winnipeg so conspicuously silent?

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DORIS MITTON

Mrs. Alaina Lockhart (Fundy Royal, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, there are people who come into your life who are inherently good, people who radiate kindness, warmth, and love. Doris Mitton was one of those people, and I am profoundly sad that we lost her this week.

Doris filled every room she walked into with a smile and an energy that made everyone feel that anything was possible. She was always optimistic and committed to making a difference in whatever way she could.

Statements by Members

She and I shared a passion for the work of the Canadian Cancer Society, and worked side by side to deliver a Relay for Life experience for the people of Sussex that was both meaningful and hopeful. Sadly, being passionate about the cause did not grant Doris immunity from this devastating disease.

Today, I honour Doris, and I send heartfelt condolences to her husband Travis, her children, her grandchildren, and her extended family and friends.

Goodbye, Doris. May we all aspire to be a bright light like her.

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GULF OF GEORGIA CANNERY

Mr. Joe Peschisolido (Steveston—Richmond East, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to pay tribute to the Gulf of Georgia Cannery National Historic Site. Built in 1894, and located in the fishing village of Steveston, the cannery was part of the largest commercial fishing port in Canada. It is now a museum presenting the history of Canada's west coast fishing industry.

[Translation]

This cannery tells the history of Richmond and is an important part of our economic and cultural heritage. It is also part of Richmond's future, as tourists and locals alike come to realize that the stories told here are not unlike what they experience today.

[English]

I would like to thank the Gulf of Georgia Cannery Society for its dedication and hard work in preserving our fishing history.

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AGRICULTURE AND AGRI-FOOD

Hon. Kevin Sorenson (Battle River—Crowfoot, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to be working with ranchers from central Alberta who have come to Parliament with the Canadian beef producers to make the government aware of measures required to deal with the detection of bovine tuberculosis in some herds, and the quarantine of these animals. They testified before the agriculture committee, and I am pleased to be one of the members of Parliament who wrote to the Minister of Agriculture, spelling out what is needed.

Lives and livelihoods are being destroyed as the slow pace of testing proceeds. They need funding to cover the additional feed costs caused by the CFIA's mandatory quarantine. They need the CFIA to consider having local veterinarians speed up testing. They need to feed their calves, which should already have been sold, so that they can pay their bills.

The 34 families in the ranching businesses affected by this situation appreciate the actions to assure compensation for animals that must be destroyed.

I hope that the minister takes their requests seriously, so that ranchers and producers—

• (1410)

The Speaker: The hon. member for Niagara Centre.

CHARLES STEELE

Mr. Vance Badawey (Niagara Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, last week, Mr. Charles “Chuck” Steele of the City of Port Colborne passed way at the age of 99. Loving husband of Gladys for 72 years, he was a father, a grandfather, and a great-grandfather of 14.

Born in the family cottage in Wainfleet, Ontario on September 25, 1917, Mr. Steele lived in south Niagara all his life. Mr. Steele joined the RCAF in 1940, and flew several Spitfire missions over Europe during the Second World War as part of the 411 Squadron.

After the war, he took over his uncle's business and started C.M. Steele Insurance Agency Ltd. in the city of Port Colborne. His love of horses, which had him travelling across Ontario, was only matched by his commitment to our community, not only in the southern part of the region, but throughout the entire region of Niagara.

He volunteered in several local organizations. Chuck Steele was always giving to his community, helping to make it a better place to live, work, and raise a family.

We thank Chuck for the legacy he has left behind through members of his family and his everlasting contributions to our community.

* * *

[Translation]

CENTRE FOR MAINTAINING EMOTIONAL BALANCE

Mr. Emmanuel Dubourg (Bourassa, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, today is the 30th anniversary of the foundation commonly referred to as CAMÉÉ, the Centre d'activités pour le maintien de l'équilibre émotionnel, or the centre for maintaining emotional balance.

Created in 1986 by and for people with mental health problems, this support group provides its members a place where they can learn to cope with their fears and suffering, and find ways to regain control of their lives. Thirty years later, CAMÉÉ continues to fight poverty and prejudice, break the fetters of isolation, and provide a better quality of life to women and men with mental health problems.

I congratulate the centre's leadership and its volunteers. I wish continued success to this emotional support centre in Montreal North.

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[English]

HOLODOMOR

Mr. Robert Sopuck (Dauphin—Swan River—Neepawa, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as the member of Parliament for Dauphin—Swan River—Neepawa, where Ukrainian heritage runs deep, I rise today to remember the Holodomor, where millions of Ukrainians died from starvation during 1932 and 1933 under the brutal rule of Joseph Stalin.

Statements by Members

Stalin and the Soviet Union were committed to curtailing Ukraine's autonomy by launching an onslaught of intimidation, arrests, imprisonment, and the execution of thousands of Ukrainian intellectuals and political and church leaders. Farmers and townspeople were deliberately starved. Crops and seeds were stolen. They were left in isolated confinement with no food to endure a harsh winter. It is estimated that between four and six million Ukrainians perished as a direct result.

The year of 2016 marks the 125th anniversary of Ukrainian settlement in Canada. We are proud to have been the first western country to recognize Ukraine's independence in 1991, when the country ended a long period of totalitarian oppression.

On Saturday, November 26, let us all commemorate the solemn anniversary of the Holodomor, and ensure “never again”.

* * *

VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN

Ms. Ruby Sahota (Brampton North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, tomorrow, marks the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women. This international day was designated by the UN General Assembly in 1999 to raise awareness of the violence faced by women all around the world.

The date also marks the start of 16 days of activism against gender-based violence that end on International Human Rights Day on December 10.

Violence against women is a violation of human rights. It is a reality that we must address each and every single day.

Gender-based violence grows out of a culture that devalues women and femininity through sexist jokes, derogatory language, and media messages that objectify women. It affects all of us by destroying families, weakening the fabric of our society, and hurting our communities and the economy.

Gender-based violence exists because sexism and misogyny continue to be prevalent in our society—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Trois-Rivières.

* * *

[*Translation*]

TROIS-RIVIÈRES

Mr. Robert Aubin (Trois-Rivières, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I usually show a bit of restraint and try not to get too caught up in the magic and joy of Christmas before December 1. However, I do not want to miss out on this opportunity to thank the hundreds, if not thousands of volunteers back home who are involved in the following events, beginning this weekend: the fifth annual “Fête des jouets”; the seventh fundraising drive for the social pediatric centre; the 11th gift-wrapping campaign to benefit the fight against MS; the 16th media fundraising drive; the 31st year of Operation Red Nose; and last but not least, the granddaddy of all our events, the 58th edition of the Noël du Pauvre telethon.

As a way of thanking these volunteers for their efforts, I invite everyone to join the ranks of those who donate their time or money out of the goodness of their hearts.

I hope this spirit of solidarity that brings us closer together now will carry on throughout the year so that, together, we can build a fairer and more equitable society.

* * *

●(1415)

[*English*]

LETISHA REIMER

Hon. Ed Fast (Abbotsford, CPC): Mr. Speaker, on November 1, Abbotsford lost a precious teenage life to a senseless act of violence.

Our entire community is grieving the loss of Letisha Reimer. “Letisha was a phenomenal person, and we just love her,” said Mike Olynyk, student ministries pastor at South Abbotsford Church. Mike went on to say, “We miss her, and she will forever be in our hearts, because of how she connected each of us to her and to each other.” The outpouring of love and compassion has been overwhelming.

A community campaign called “Abby Strong” is now raising funds for the families of Letisha and her 14-year-old best friend, who was badly injured. The words “Abby Strong” have been emblazoned on shirts bearing the colours of Abbotsford Senior Secondary School.

I encourage Canadians to visit the Abby Strong Facebook page to see how they too can support these two broken-hearted families.

On behalf of all of us in the House, we send our love and prayers to the families and friends of these two girls. We are, and forever will be, Abby Strong.

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[*Translation*]

SOUTH SHORE ASSOCIATION FOR PARENTS AND PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

Mrs. Sherry Romanado (Longueuil—Charles-LeMoyne, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as the member for Longueuil—Charles-LeMoyne, I rise today to mark the 40th anniversary of Association des parents et des handicapés de la Rive-Sud métropolitaine. I attended a wonderful event on November 12 in my riding to celebrate this milestone.

I would like to congratulate the board of directors, the management team, and especially the tremendous volunteers for their daily commitment over the past 40 years. This year, they provided much-needed respite and support to over 250 families. Without their audacity and courage, the association would never have come to be. They do a wonderful job, and their commitment is extremely admirable.

Congratulations.

*Oral Questions***ORAL QUESTIONS***[Translation]***ETHICS**

Hon. Denis Lebel (Lac-Saint-Jean, CPC): Mr. Speaker, although there is no lack of urgent issues to deal with, our Prime Minister does not seem too concerned.

However, when the time comes to raise money for the Liberal Party or the Trudeau Foundation, or to meet with Chinese billionaires who have expressed an interest in meeting him, he hastens to oblige.

Will the Prime Minister finally follow the ethics rules he himself put in place about a year ago?

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc (Minister of Fisheries, Oceans and the Canadian Coast Guard, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, my colleague opposite knows very well that we always follow the political fundraising rules that our government and the Canada Elections Act impose on all political parties.

My colleague is fully aware that our government devotes a great deal of time and energy to helping the middle class and growing the economy. That continues to be our government's priority, and we are proud of our record.

Hon. Denis Lebel (Lac-Saint-Jean, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister's fundraising rules seem to be rather elastic.

We know that the Prime Minister will again tell us that he is following the rules. However, when a justice minister has a meeting at a law office with lawyers who one day may apply to be judges, and I could rhyme off a long list of names, one really has to wonder whether this is ethical.

Will it take a big donation to the Liberal Party for it to listen to the forestry industry?

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc (Minister of Fisheries, Oceans and the Canadian Coast Guard, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, my colleague opposite knows very well that the forestry industry and its workers across Canada are a top priority for the Minister of International Trade and our government.

He knows very well that we are committed to finding solutions that will support this industry, which is so important to all regions in Canada, including the one my colleague opposite represents.

• (1420)

[English]

Hon. Denis Lebel (Lac-Saint-Jean, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it seems the Prime Minister has forgotten about the important files that matter to Canadians, like creating jobs and important agreements. He only has time for cash for access meetings and fundraising for the Liberal Party and the Trudeau Foundation. When will the Prime Minister follow the ethical rules he personally put in place a year ago?

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc (Minister of Fisheries, Oceans and the Canadian Coast Guard, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as I said a moment ago and as my colleague knows very well, Canada has, according to the Chief Electoral Officer himself, some of the most robust and important political fundraising rules in the world. Our party has always followed those rules. Every member of the cabinet and every

member of Parliament from our caucus follows those rules at all times. We are proud to do so. When the rules are followed, I hate to tell my friend across the aisle, there can be no conflict of interest.

Hon. Candice Bergen (Portage—Lisgar, CPC): Mr. Speaker, selling access and influence to billionaires from China is giving Canadians a clearer picture of who the Prime Minister really is. We know that the Prime Minister has always admired China's dictatorship, but to conduct government business at a Liberal fundraiser with billionaires who are also members of the Chinese Communist party is shocking. When will the Prime Minister admit that he was wrong, and put an end to these obvious abuses of the public trust?

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc (Minister of Fisheries, Oceans and the Canadian Coast Guard, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, our colleague knows very well that at events like this, government business is not discussed. Our colleague also knows very well that all members of the House of Commons, including ministers in her former government, attended fundraising events very similar to this one. She should not be shocked when in a minute I get up and read her a list of her former colleagues who attended events exactly like this one.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order, please.

[Translation]

I appreciate the efforts of the hon. member for Beauport—Côte-de-Beaupré—Île d'Orléans—Charlevoix to get her colleagues to quiet down.

The hon. House Leader of the Official Opposition.

[English]

Hon. Candice Bergen (Portage—Lisgar, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I can guarantee the member we did no fundraisers with Chinese communists.

The Prime Minister himself said they were conducting government business at these fundraisers. He said it just two days ago. In fact, he defended the Liberal cash for access fundraisers as a means to conduct this government business. It is a shocking admission, and I am not surprised that the fisheries minister is surprised himself that the Prime Minister said that, but he did.

Can the Prime Minister explain to Canadians how soliciting donations from these individuals while at the same time conducting government business is in any way ethical?

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc (Minister of Fisheries, Oceans and the Canadian Coast Guard, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the opposition House leader knows very well that only Canadians can make donations to Canadian political parties. I would assume those are the kinds of Canadians who attended a \$500-a-ticket fundraising event with Joe Oliver on May 29, 2015, or maybe the \$500-a-ticket fundraiser with Jason Kenney on January 30, 2015, or maybe the \$1,500-a-ticket fundraiser with former immigration minister Chris Alexander at a private home in Toronto. Maybe those are the kinds of events that she is familiar with.

Oral Questions

[Translation]

Hon. Thomas Mulcair (Outremont, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister himself participated in 20 or so fundraisers that gave rich people privileged access.

He also participated in at least three activities organized by Canada 2020, a liberal group that is under no obligation to disclose who made donations in exchange for meeting the Prime Minister. Now all of a sudden, Canada 2020 is worried about a scandal.

Why does the Liberal government keep denying that there is a problem when the problem is perfectly clear to liberal groups like Canada 2020?

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc (Minister of Fisheries, Oceans and the Canadian Coast Guard, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, once again, my colleague from Outremont knows very well that we follow campaign financing rules and the law scrupulously. He knows very well, having participated in a \$300-a-ticket event in Edmonton on April 8, 2016, that such practices are the norm in all political parties.

We will continue to follow the rules.

• (1425)

[English]

Hon. Thomas Mulcair (Outremont, NDP): Mr. Speaker, this sort of access for cash has to do with the Ministry of Fisheries. Of course, it is a bit fishy.

If only the government had some sort of guidelines about these events. Oh, wait, “there should be no preferential access to government, or appearance of preferential access, accorded to individuals or organizations because they have made financial contributions to...political parties”.

Can the Liberals please try to explain how their cash for access fundraisers do not break their own Liberal rules? They are the government.

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc (Minister of Fisheries, Oceans and the Canadian Coast Guard, Lib.): Yes, Mr. Speaker, we know very well we are the government and the member for Outremont, I think, knows that as well.

He is wondering why the fisheries minister is getting up. He is continually on a fishing trip to find perceived and imagined wrongdoing where none exists. He knows that very well. We are proud to follow all of the fundraising rules, just as he did when he went to Edmonton at \$300 a person.

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PENSIONS

Hon. Thomas Mulcair (Outremont, NDP): Mr. Speaker, today the Liberals shut down an attempt to bring Liberal fundraisers to appear before committee. It is almost as if they had something to hide. Yesterday, they shut down an entire committee when New Democrats proposed that the Liberal CPP legislation be fixed so that it no longer penalizes women. These sunny days are indeed getting shorter and shorter.

Can the finance minister explain how he allowed this CPP bill to be drafted without the standard protections for women and why he continues to refuse every attempt to fix it?

Hon. Scott Brison (President of the Treasury Board, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the government and the finance minister achieved a historic agreement with the provinces and territories to expand the Canada pension plan. That is going to make a significant and positive difference in the lives of Canadians in terms of a secure, dignified retirement.

We are aware that more could be done in respect of the dropout provisions for disability and child rearing and, in fact, the Minister of Finance will raise these provisions at the next meeting of the provincial and territorial finance ministers in December in the context of a triennial review of the CPP.

Hon. Thomas Mulcair (Outremont, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I guess they are trying to say it is the provinces' fault that they left women out.

[Translation]

Let us talk about Pierre Trudeau, and no, I do not mean the foundation. In 1977, it was clear that the Canada Pension Plan Act penalized parents who chose to stay home to raise their children, so 40 years ago, his government changed the plan. Now the same debate has surfaced again, but this Liberal government is refusing to protect women.

Our question for the government is this: what would Pierre Trudeau have thought of this?

[English]

Hon. Scott Brison (President of the Treasury Board, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as I said, the Minister of Finance is actually raising this issue with provincial and territorial finance ministers when they meet in December to address this issue.

Beyond that, our government introduced the Canada child benefit, which will raise over 300,000 Canadian children out of poverty, which will mean that for a single parent making \$30,000 per year, they will receive \$6,000 more per year, tax-free, from the Government of Canada. That is because we are doing more for the families who need it.

Why did the NDP vote against those provisions?

* * *

[Translation]

ETHICS

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher (Beauport—Côte-de-Beaupré—Île d'Orléans—Charlevoix, CPC): Mr. Speaker, today we learned that Canada 2020 just introduced some rules to provide a framework for fundraising activities involving the Prime Minister and Liberal ministers, recognizing that there is a serious problem.

Given that Canada 2020 recognizes this important problem, why is it that the government opposite finds it impossible to also recognize that there is a problem and that it is breaking the ethics rules that the Prime Minister himself put in place?

Oral Questions

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc (Minister of Fisheries, Oceans and the Canadian Coast Guard, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, my colleague should know, and I believe she is well aware, that we are following all the rules regarding political financing.

We were the ones who strengthened the rules to make them stricter. When we follow the rules in place, as we have always done, and all information about our political party is made public, there can be no conflict of interest.

• (1430)

Mr. Luc Berthold (Mégantic—L'Érable, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Liberal family seems to be feeling a bit of panic. Once again, the Liberals have been caught red-handed. It is in their DNA.

When the Prime Minister breaks his own ethics rules, everyone has carte blanche to do so. As we have seen, this time it was Canada 2020, which is very close to the Liberals, that was forced to bring in rules to control access to ministers and the Prime Minister. Where there is smoke, there is fire.

When will the Prime Minister finally do the same and stop giving Liberal donors privileged access to members of his government?

[English]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, yesterday the member for Red Deer—Lacombe made some allegations in here, false allegations.

He stated that we cannot find an instance where Prime Minister Stephen Harper or anybody in the former cabinet previously had so-called cash for access events. What has actually happened? On May 19, there was one; on January 30, there was one; on May 6, there was one.

Would the member, in essence, like to retract that, or would the Conservative Party acknowledge that what we are doing is no different than what they did?

Ms. Marilyn Gladu (Sarnia—Lambton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, yesterday the Liberals confirmed what we have been saying for weeks, that the Prime Minister's open and accountable government rules are merely a prop.

These rules state that there should be no “appearance of preferential access” in exchange for political donations. After breaking these rules for months, I guess the Liberals had no choice but to admit they were merely a prop.

How can Canadians have any faith in the Prime Minister's integrity when he clearly has no respect for his own rules?

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is very clear that Canada has some of the strictest rules in the country in regard to financing.

If there is no breaking of the rules or the laws, there is no conflict of interest. I indicated very clearly that under the Conservative government, Conservatives had the very same type of fundraising events that we are seeing today. I cited three of them, for instance. I would suggest that in fact there is no conflict of interest here.

Ms. Marilyn Gladu (Sarnia—Lambton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, when the Shenglin president pays \$1,500 for access to the Prime Minister and then gets his new bank approved, that is what we call preferential access and conflict of interest.

When a Chinese billionaire attends a cash for access event with the Prime Minister and donates \$1 million, and \$50,000 goes to erect a statue of the Prime Minister's dad, Canadians know this is a conflict of interest, especially when the wealthy Chinese billionaire is a political adviser to the Communist government in Beijing, the same government the Liberals want a trade deal with.

Does the Prime Minister actually believe any Canadians are buying this nonsensical excuse?

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc (Minister of Fisheries, Oceans and the Canadian Coast Guard, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the manufactured indignation does not change the facts.

My colleague referred to the bank approval. She knows very well that that bank approval was given in July 2015 by her former colleague, the then-finance minister Joe Oliver.

They keep talking about a donation to an independent foundation that does great work for Canada. The Trudeau Foundation has confirmed that that particular donation, the conversations, and discussions began in 2014 with respect that donation.

The Speaker: I think I heard the member for Cypress Hills—Grasslands eight times today and he has not had the floor, so let us listen the hon. member for Red Deer—Lacombe.

Mr. Blaine Calkins (Red Deer—Lacombe, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the ethical walls are crashing down on the Prime Minister. We learned today that the Liberal think tank, Canada 2020, is running away from this Liberal fundraising quagmire to protect its own integrity.

The Ethics Commissioner has called these Liberal fundraisers “unsavoury”, and the Commissioner of Lobbying is undertaking an investigation. Why is it that everyone except the Prime Minister can see that these cash for access events are unethical?

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am somewhat surprised. I thought maybe the member would apologize for misleading the House yesterday when he tried to give a false impression.

Let me suggest to the member that he needs to recognize what he should have said was in fact on May 19, 2015, there was \$500 a ticket to attend a fundraiser with the finance minister of the time, Joe Oliver. On January 30, 2015, there was another \$500 dinner sponsored by the employment and social development minister, Jason Kenney, so there is more to it, and I was expecting the member to actually apologize for misleading the House yesterday.

• (1435)

The Speaker: Order. Be careful how we characterize the acts of other members.

Oral Questions

The hon. member for Red Deer—Lacombe.

Mr. Blaine Calkins (Red Deer—Lacombe, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I wondered what kind of defence they would try to chuck across the floor today. It is obviously a lot different than the one they tried yesterday.

Canada 2020 gets it. The Commissioner of Lobbying gets it. The Ethics Commissioner gets it. The former Liberal deputy prime minister, Sheila Copps gets it. I watched Peter Mansbridge last night. I think he got it. Good God, even the *Toronto Star* gets it. They all understand that these Liberal cash for access events are unethical. When will the Prime Minister put a stop to these cash for access events?

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have said on many occasions that at the end of the day we look at our laws and rules, and we as a party have followed those laws and rules. Nothing has been broken here. If we do not break the laws there is no conflict of interest. In fact, I would refer to, whether it is the New Democrats, or the Conservatives, where they have had to pay back monies.

There have been no laws broken here, so there are no conflicts of interest to be challenged on this issue.

* * *

INFRASTRUCTURE

Mr. Guy Caron (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques, NDP): Basically, Mr. Speaker, their defence is that they are as bad as the Conservatives were.

[*Translation*]

In a fit of honesty, the Minister of Finance admitted that small municipalities would not really benefit from the infrastructure bank.

The minister said that private investors were looking to invest in major transformational projects that will produce revenues with a high rate of return.

Michael Sabia talked about a rate of 7% to 9%. These investors will not be interested in bridges or roads if the return is not so great.

Why take \$15 billion that could have been used by municipalities such as Rimouski or Jonquière, and hand it over for projects that are tailor-made for Toronto or Montreal?

[*English*]

Hon. Amarjeet Sohi (Minister of Infrastructure and Communities, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we understand that infrastructure is the foundation for building strong and sustainable communities of all sizes, including rural communities and small communities.

Let me share some information. Out of more than 980 projects that we approved so far, more than 600 of those projects are in communities with a population of fewer than 100,000 people. We are helping all communities to build the necessary infrastructure they need, because we understand we need to grow the economy across the nation.

Ms. Rachel Blaney (North Island—Powell River, NDP): Mr. Speaker, every day it becomes clear the Liberals have been dishonest about their infrastructure bank. When asked repeatedly if people

should expect to pay more to use this infrastructure the finance minister deflects and obfuscates. The Liberals never mentioned they would use public infrastructure to pass revenue to the private sector through user fees and tolls. Why are they doing this now, and why did they mislead Canadians during the campaign?

Hon. Amarjeet Sohi (Minister of Infrastructure and Communities, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we were elected on a platform to do historic investment in infrastructure, including the creation of the infrastructure bank. The role of the bank is to build more infrastructure for Canadian communities. We will do that by providing low-cost loans and loan guarantees, as well as taking an equity stake in projects that otherwise would not have happened.

Our role is to grow the economy, create jobs for Canadians, and make sure that all communities are prospering.

* * *

ETHICS

Mr. John Brassard (Barrie—Innisfil, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister and Kathleen Wynne are at it again.

Canadians paid hundreds of thousands of dollars for Wynne's high-level staff to move to Ottawa to run the PMO. What do we get for that? We get the same disastrous Ontario green energy plan that is now being pushed onto to all Canadians.

Now we learn that the federal Liberals paid over \$23,000 for public relations services for Kathleen Wynne's recent trip to Israel.

All of us know that Ontario is broke, but why are Canadian taxpayers paying for Kathleen Wynne's public relations bills?

• (1440)

Hon. Scott Brison (President of the Treasury Board, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, on an ongoing basis, our government consults with and engages Canadians.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order. I know how much members appreciate brief answers, but let us listen now to the hon. member for Barrie—Innisfil.

Mr. John Brassard (Barrie—Innisfil, CPC): I am sorry, Mr. Speaker, I should have let the member finish his lunch before I asked the question.

The connections between Kathleen Wynne, the Prime Minister, Gerald Butts, and Katie Telford are alive and well.

As ridiculous as this sounds, Kathleen Wynne asked her operatives in the Prime Minister's Office to pay for preparation, implementation, and monitoring of a recent trip to Israel, and guess what? Butts, Telford, and the Prime Minister said "Sure", to the tune of \$23,000.

We all know that Ontario is broke, but why are the federal Liberals using federal cash to pay for their friend Kathleen Wynne's public relations bills?

Oral Questions

The Speaker: I trust that the hon. President of the Treasury Board was simply ruminating on the question that is posed. He knows we are not allowed to eat in the House.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Foreign Affairs.

Hon. Stéphane Dion (Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is just that my colleague has the wrong information. The amount of money he speaks about is an amount of money that was available to anyone—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Hon. Stéphane Dion: Mr. Speaker, it happens that we are very pleased that the Premier of Ontario went to Israel. She did a great job there, and she had the services of the embassy, to which everyone is welcome.

If my colleague wants to go, he will have the same service.

* * *

THE ECONOMY

Mr. Pat Kelly (Calgary Rocky Ridge, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Liberals really have lost touch completely with Canadians. They are wasting money left, right, and centre: limos, moving expenses, cash payments to staff, and the Prime Minister's ongoing international junkets.

They are increasing taxes on hard-working Canadians with payroll tax increases, a carbon tax, and a small business tax increase. Canadian families are struggling, and the Prime Minister is spending all this time with billionaires and celebrities.

When will the Prime Minister start hearing the pleas of regular Canadians and stop making their hard situations worse?

Hon. Navdeep Bains (Minister of Innovation, Science and Economic Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, our Prime Minister has been very focused on the economy and creating jobs.

That is why we are very proud to work with Bell Helicopter for the creation of 1,000 jobs. That is why Thomson Reuters has created up to 1,500 jobs under the leadership of this Prime Minister. That is why we have 1,000 engineering jobs at GM.

Not only that, but let me take this opportunity to highlight some other companies, as well. DLA Piper and Kira Systems: we have helped with the increased recycling of electronic products, 260 jobs. ON Studio Animation in Montreal: we helped increase production for animation films, 300 jobs. Optel Vision—

* * *

HOUSING

Mr. Pat Kelly (Calgary Rocky Ridge, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Liam saved up the down payment for a home in Strathmore. He was pre-approved for a mortgage in his price range and was just waiting for his lease to expire so that he could move into a new home.

Then the Minister of Finance changed the rules. Now Liam cannot qualify for anything in Strathmore, Chestermere, or Calgary.

The Prime Minister is running a \$30 billion deficit, and plans to borrow tens of millions more to revamp 24 Sussex.

How can the Prime Minister do this, while telling Liam that he cannot have a mortgage?

Mr. François-Philippe Champagne (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, let me say what this government is all about and remind my friend on the other side. We are investing \$180 billion over 12 years. That is a historic investment.

Let me remind the member what we are doing: \$25.3 billion in public transit; we are investing \$21.9 billion in green infrastructure for Canadians; we are investing \$10.1 billion in transport projects in this country; we are investing \$2 billion in rural and northern communities.

We are creating Invest in Canada to attract investment. All that—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order. I think we all know that the members for Brantford—Brant and Barrie—Innisfil can count, but they should not do it while someone else is answering a question.

The hon. member for Desnethé—Missinippi—Churchill River.

* * *

● (1445)

HEALTH

Ms. Georgina Jolibois (Desnethé—Missinippi—Churchill River, NDP): Mr. Speaker, a senior official at Health Canada admitted at committee that it has no method of tracking requests, delays, or denials when it comes to counselling for first nation kids. This is a major concern.

Last month, in my riding alone, there have been several suicide attempts, and six were successful.

What is the government's plan for identifying the needs of indigenous youth? How can the health minister know what is needed without tracking this information?

Hon. Jane Philpott (Minister of Health, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for her question, which refers to a discussion we had at the indigenous affairs committee last week. We talked about the mechanisms by which the first nations and Inuit health branch is responding to the needs of indigenous Canadians.

I am very pleased to say that indeed we are tracking those needs. In fact, I just returned from Manitoba where I was able to ascertain that 1,000 children have now been assessed for the full implementation of Jordan's principle to make sure that they have access to the care they need. People are very pleased that kids are getting the care they deserve.

*Oral Questions***STATUS OF WOMEN**

Ms. Sheila Malcolmson (Nanaimo—Ladysmith, NDP): Mr. Speaker, last week, the United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women released its report on Canada. It denounced the closure of 12 of 16 Status of Women regional offices.

These Conservative cuts limited women's access to services, especially in rural and remote areas. The UN has now asked the current government to reopen the regional offices.

Does the minister agree with the United Nations? Will she reopen the 12 Status of Women offices to better serve women, no matter where they live, yes or no?

Ms. Anju Dhillon (Parliamentary Secretary for Status of Women, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Government of Canada is committed to preventing all forms of gender-based violence. We are working very hard on this matter. Throughout the summer we held consultations, and we will continue our good work on preventing such situations.

* * *

DEMOCRATIC REFORM

Ms. Jennifer O'Connell (Pickering—Uxbridge, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, our government committed to making it easier for Canadians to vote. Can the Minister of Democratic Institutions update this House on the next steps to ensure our elections are more open and inclusive?

Hon. Maryam Monsef (Minister of Democratic Institutions, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the member for Pickering—Uxbridge for this very thoughtful question.

I am pleased that today in this House we introduced Bill C-33. This bill is intended to repeal the unfair elements of the Fair Elections Act. We are going to remove unnecessary barriers for young people, seniors, indigenous persons, and homeless people who do not have access to proper identification, for example.

The bill will be debated in this House, and I am counting on our colleagues in this place to help further strengthen this bill.

* * *

NATIONAL DEFENCE

Mr. James Bezan (Selkirk—Interlake—Eastman, CPC): Mr. Speaker, yesterday the Liberals refused to answer how much the obsolete Super Hornet will cost and how many jobs will be lost in Canada's aerospace industry.

Former national defence procurement head Dan Ross said, "This was probably the worst possible option.... The taxpayers will bear the cost of this...".

Experts have unequivocally stated that operating an interim fleet will significantly increase the air force's operational costs.

Why are the Liberals wasting tax dollars, breaking the rules, and breaking their promise for a fair and open competition?

Hon. Harjit S. Sajjan (Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we are investing in the Canadian Armed Forces. We are

going to have an open and transparent competition, making sure that any company that meets the requirements will be able to compete.

In the interim, we are going to be filling the capability gap and not risk-managing as the previous government did. We are also going to be staying in the joint strike fighter program, which is going to benefit all Canadians.

We are going to be investing in the Canadian Armed Forces and not cutting as the previous government did.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus (Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the only thing the minister can say to explain our capability gap is that we have a capability gap. I would remind him that repeating a lie does not make it true. There is no capability gap.

The Liberals should immediately launch a competition to replace our CF-18s instead of buying a fleet of 18 Super Hornets that we do not need.

How many billions of dollars, four, five, six, or seven, are the Liberals going to burn through to acquire the wrong aircraft?

[*English*]

Hon. Harjit S. Sajjan (Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, one, we do have a capability gap. I have spoken with the member opposite, who is the former parliamentary secretary to the minister of national defence, and he knows the numbers and the operational commitments that we have. Right now, we currently cannot meet those commitments simultaneously.

I do not understand why the Conservatives are against investing in the Canadian Armed Forces with an interim fleet right now.

* * *

● (1450)

IMMIGRATION, REFUGEES AND CITIZENSHIP

Ms. Rachael Harder (Lethbridge, CPC): Mr. Speaker, female survivors of sexual slavery require special care and attention. Even the United Nations is calling upon Canada to ensure that Yazidi women and girls receive this type of care upon arrival. Yesterday, I put forward a motion at the Standing Committee on the Status of Women asking that Canada secure a plan for these young women and girls who are coming into our country in the coming months. Unfortunately, the Liberals were quick to defeat my motion without even so much as a discussion. Why are the Liberals rejecting every single effort put forward to serve these Yazidi women and girls?

Hon. John McCallum (Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is quite the contrary. In fact, all of the Liberals, and indeed all members of the House, voted positively for a motion to bring Yazidi and other victims of Daesh here within 120 days. Therefore, we have all agreed to that. My department is working very hard to devise a plan in order to make this happen.

Oral Questions

Hon. Michelle Rempel (Calgary Nose Hill, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the truth is that it has been a month since the Prime Minister stood in this place with his hand over his heart, looked into Nadia Murad's eyes and committed to action for the Yazidi sex slave girls. Earlier this week, department officials said they were going to bring 50 of them here. This is completely unacceptable.

This morning Nadia Murad said that Yazidi victims are waiting for serious steps by the current government and that "Commitment to measly numbers is not what we expected or worked for".

The government brought 25,000 other refugees here. Why can it not do the same thing for genocide victims? This is disgusting.

Hon. John McCallum (Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, that number is wrong, and the hon. member knows it is wrong because she received a briefing from my department on our plans two days ago. Therefore, she knows very well that we are working on a plan, and she should know by now that to go public with this in a way that attracts attention will put our plan in jeopardy, make it more difficult for our people to go into that territory, and ultimately make it harder for us to rescue those victims and bring them to Canada.

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SOFTWOOD LUMBER

Ms. Tracey Ramsey (Essex, NDP): Mr. Speaker, tomorrow the U.S. Lumber Coalition is expected to file a formal complaint against Canadian producers. This will cause a major crisis for the Canadian forestry industry. When the agreement expired, the minister refused to give any assurances, and her government did not have a fallback plan. It is a month later and we still have not heard her plan.

Does the minister not understand that tens of thousands of Canadian jobs are on the line? When will she finally act to protect forestry jobs in Canada?

Hon. Chrystia Freeland (Minister of International Trade, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is important to remember that the softwood lumber agreement expired under the previous government's watch. As the Prime Minister said, we look forward to working closely with the new U.S. administration. Negotiations are continuing with the USTR. I met with Mike Froman last weekend in Lima during the APEC summit, and the Prime Minister raised the issue with President Obama.

We continue to work in close collaboration with lumber producers, workers, and the provinces and territories, but we are fighting for a good agreement, not just any agreement.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Karine Trudel (Jonquière, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am getting tired of hearing the same old thing in the House.

Tomorrow, the Americans are probably going to file a complaint against the Canadian softwood lumber industry for unfair competition. Without an agreement with the U.S., our exports are going to be heavily taxed. The entire Saguenay—Lac-Saint-Jean region will pay for the Liberals' failure to act: plants will close, there will be less work for our entrepreneurs, and jobs will be lost. In short, our regional economy will be weakened. I have been asking the government for a plan B for months.

Does the Minister of International Trade realize how urgent this is? What does her government plan on doing to help our businesses and support our workers?

Hon. Chrystia Freeland (Minister of International Trade, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we have been engaged in intense negotiations and consultations for months.

The Conseil du patronat du Québec commended the government "for all it has done in defence of the Quebec forestry industry".

Meanwhile, the Quebec Forest Industry Council is "pleased with the government's position on Quebec's forestry regime".

Only the opposition fails to recognize the work we are doing to protect Quebec and Canadian workers.

* * *

● (1455)

[*English*]

NATURAL RESOURCES

Mr. Mark Strahl (Chilliwack—Hope, CPC): Mr. Speaker, tens of thousands of unemployed energy workers face a bleak Christmas this year thanks to inaction by the Liberal government. Energy east is stalled, northern gateway is in limbo, and the Trans Mountain expansion is delayed.

Hard-working middle-class Canadians are tired of the delays, tired of the Liberal red tape, and tired of the silence from the minister. When will the minister speak up for the plight of these unemployed workers and when will he do something to help them get back to work?

Hon. Jim Carr (Minister of Natural Resources, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we have not been silent. We have been speaking from the moment this government came to power about the importance of developing our credible regulatory process and giving proponents of these projects some certainty.

In the case of all of the projects that the hon. member has mentioned, there are deadlines and processes. Literally tens of thousands of Canadians have offered their points of view, and we are very pleased to listen to all of them.

Mr. Mark Strahl (Chilliwack—Hope, CPC): Mr. Speaker, under our government, the Keystone, Alberta clipper, anchor loop, Line 9B, and northern gateway pipelines were all approved. The northern gateway pipeline will go to tidewater if the Liberal government does not kill it. Jobs will only be created if the government starts to fight for these projects to actually get built.

While the minister dithers, unemployed workers worry about how they will keep a roof over their heads and food on the table, and first nations equity partners stand to lose billions of dollars.

Does the minister have anything to offer these workers other than more empty rhetoric and Liberal inaction?

Hon. Jim Carr (Minister of Natural Resources, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we could talk about the action of the Harper Conservative government. Let us talk about the number of kilometres of pipeline that were built to oceans during that government's 10 years. The number is zero.

If the hon. member thinks that it makes good public policy to try to repeat that failure, we think we have a better way. We have offered the people of Canada ample opportunity to offer their views. We have a process. We have certainty of deadlines. We have a much better process than the one we inherited.

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AGRICULTURE AND AGRI-FOOD

Mr. David Anderson (Cypress Hills—Grasslands, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the government has failed energy workers and it is failing farmers as well.

Too many agriculture decisions are made a long way from the field and yesterday the Liberals did it again. They announced that neonic chemicals are being removed for pest control. These products have been used safely and effectively for years. There has been inadequate science, no cost analysis, and competitors have not made this move.

Why are the Liberals once again putting our agriculture producers at a disadvantage?

Hon. Jane Philpott (Minister of Health, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, our government takes matters of health and safety seriously. Health Canada reviews pesticides on a regular basis.

As a part of its review, Health Canada has found that a particular pesticide imidacloprid can be found in concentrations up to 290 times the level of acceptable risk. Given this, Health Canada is proposing to phase out agricultural uses of imidacloprid over a period of three to five years. Health Canada is being sensitive to the needs of the agricultural community, while at the same time protecting the environment in proposing this evidence-based decision.

* * *

SCIENCE

Mr. Majid Jowhari (Richmond Hill, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this summer we mobilized over 35 young volunteers in Richmond Hill in order to recruit stem cell donors for Canadian Blood Services onematch initiative. It became evident to me that stem cell research was breaking ground in cancer research and Canadians knew it.

In budget 2016, our government recognized stem cell research as one of the key issues our Minister of Science must tackle. Could the Minister of Science update the House on her work with regards to this file?

Hon. Kirsty Duncan (Minister of Science, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Canada is globally recognized as a founder and leader of stem cell research. Regenerative medicine has the power to repair, regenerate, or replace damaged cells, tissues, and organs affected by illness.

Oral Questions

To further Canada's leadership, today I announced \$12 million, allocated through budget 2016, to the Stem Cell Network. Funds will support 31 projects and clinical trials that are developing real world therapies, products, and treatments regarding regenerative medicine.

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[Translation]

REGIONAL ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Mr. Bernard Généreux (Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup, CPC): Mr. Speaker, when the Liberals eliminated the position of minister responsible for the economic development of Quebec upon taking office, Quebec entrepreneurs and job creators lost their voice in the federal government. Not deviating from their policy to centralize all the power, the Liberals are claiming that a minister from Toronto, who rarely sets foot in Quebec, can properly represent the entire country.

When will the government stop ignoring the regions of Quebec and those of its residents who do not have enough money to pay \$1,500 to get access to the Liberals?

● (1500)

Hon. Navdeep Bains (Minister of Innovation, Science and Economic Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we have a strong team of 40-odd members from everywhere across the province who are working hard for Quebec. Since we took office, Canada Economic Development, or CED, has approved \$290 million in grants and contributions. That funding supports the development of over 384 businesses and organizations. Our government is committed to promoting innovation, fostering the growth of businesses, and developing a clean economy that benefits everyone.

* * *

[English]

THE ENVIRONMENT

Ms. Linda Duncan (Edmonton Strathcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Liberals' long-term climate strategy submitted to the United Nations claims that they will encourage green infrastructure in northern and remote indigenous communities, while ensuring that any consultations on projects must respect the constitutional, legal, and international obligations to indigenous peoples.

In the wake of federal approvals of the Site C dam and the major LNG projects that encroach on indigenous rights and territories, is this the depth of commitment we can expect to indigenous rights from the government?

Oral Questions

Hon. Catherine McKenna (Minister of Environment and Climate Change, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as the member opposite well knows, our government is committed to our obligations under the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and rebuilding our relationship with indigenous peoples. That is why, with every project, the Canadian Environmental Assessment Agency undergoes a review. We meet with indigenous groups, we listen to their concerns, we accommodate them.

With the Pacific NorthWest project, we have the first ever indigenous environmental monitoring committee with the indigenous groups that are impacted by the project.

* * *

AGRICULTURE AND AGRI-FOOD

Mr. Lloyd Longfield (Guelph, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, bovine tuberculosis is affecting ranchers in Alberta and Saskatchewan whose herds are under quarantine because of this disease.

As a member of the Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food, could the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food please tell us what he is doing to help these ranchers who have been put under quarantine by the CFIA until testing is complete?

Hon. Lawrence MacAulay (Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate my hon. colleague's interest in the issue. Being a farmer, I certainly understand that bovine TB is a serious challenge for these ranchers.

I am pleased to confirm that working with the province we are committed to compensate these ranchers for the costs they are facing, including interest on their advance payment loans.

We are working hard to address this unfortunate situation and take measures to help these ranchers with this serious challenge.

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HEALTH

Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Carleton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Ottawa Hospital expert panel carefully studied all options for a future site and chose the one right across the street, on open federal land, easily accessible by ambulances.

The Liberals are forcing the hospital to move to Tunney's Pasture, which the expert panel ranked way down at number six because of hundreds of millions of dollars in demolition costs and longer travel times for ambulances.

Will the hospital have to cut patient care to pay these extra costs and what will happen to trauma patients whose ambulances are stuck in traffic?

Hon. Mélanie Joly (Minister of Canadian Heritage, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, first, I would like to thank the National Capital Commission for its hard work.

Last spring, I asked it to do a thorough review of potential sites for the new Ottawa Civic Hospital. There was a rigorous, open, and transparent process, with 8,000 people participating in it. Ultimately, the NCC came up with an excellent site, which is Tunney's Pasture.

I will ensure that we study this recommendation and have great discussions with the Ontario government as well.

This is part of our own views of the NCC having—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Rivière-du-Nord.

* * *

[Translation]

SOFTWOOD LUMBER

Mr. Rhéal Fortin (Rivière-du-Nord, BQ): Mr. Speaker, as we all know, the softwood lumber trade war is about to reignite. Tomorrow morning, the American softwood lumber manufacturers' association will be filing an official complaint against our lumber producers before the United States International Trade Commission. This is the beginning of another crisis.

My question is simple. Will Ottawa once again fail Quebec's forestry sector and the families that depend on it, or will the government offer the industry the loan guarantees it needs to respond to the crisis, as members of the National Assembly and Quebec's forestry producers are asking?

● (1505)

Hon. Chrystia Freeland (Minister of International Trade, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the softwood lumber agreement expired under the previous government.

As the Prime Minister said, we look forward to working very closely with the new administration. I continued negotiations with Michael Froman this weekend in Lima during the APEC summit. The Prime Minister also raised the matter with President Obama.

We will continue to work closely with producers, workers, the provinces, and the territories.

Mrs. Marilène Gill (Manicouagan, BQ): Mr. Speaker, since the message is not getting through, I will repeat that the forestry sector is made up of people. It sustains 120 towns in Quebec. This is how the land is occupied, here.

A new softwood lumber crisis is affecting the people of our villages in Quebec who could lose their livelihoods and be forced to leave their region in order to find work.

I ask again, will Ottawa commit to granting loan guarantees to forestry companies to deal with the new softwood lumber crisis caused, let us face it, by the Prime Minister's inability to negotiate in the interests of our people?

Hon. Chrystia Freeland (Minister of International Trade, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we are working very hard on the softwood lumber issue, and we are working on behalf of Quebec and its workers.

Government Orders

I was pleased to meet with forestry workers and producers from Quebec this summer in Saguenay, and to meet with officials from the Montreal business community in October. I was pleased to work closely with the Government of Quebec to reach the Canada-European Union comprehensive economic and trade agreement, a progressive deal.

I am proud to work alongside my Quebec partners to protect jobs in Quebec and create new ones.

* * *

[English]

PRESENCE IN GALLERY

The Speaker: I would like to draw to the attention of hon. members the presence in the gallery of the Hon. Mark Furey, Minister of Business and Minister of Service for the province of Nova Scotia

Some hon. members: Hear, hear!

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POINTS OF ORDER

ORAL QUESTIONS

Hon. Michelle Rempel (Calgary Nose Hill, CPC): Mr. Speaker, during question period today, the Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship answered my question about how many Yazidis would come to Canada in the 120-day period. I had mentioned 50 as the number that a Foreign Affairs official had brought forward at committee. This was on the record. The minister said the number was not true and that I had received a briefing that was in camera at committee.

So given that this—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Hon. Navdeep Bains: Debate.

The Speaker: Order. I will let members know if I think it is debate. Let me hear the comment, please.

Hon. Michelle Rempel: Mr. Speaker, given that the Minister of Immigration said that the number 50 was not true and made an accusation about me, yet one of the departmental officials had said 50 on the record, I would like him either to withdraw his comment about that number not being true, or provide the House with the accurate number of how many Yazidis will be coming to Canada.

The Speaker: I see that the hon. Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship wishes to respond.

The hon. Minister of Immigration.

Hon. John McCallum (Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, yesterday I said that the number was not true, and I repeat the fact today that the number is not true.

* * *

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Hon. Candice Bergen (Portage—Lisgar, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would ask the government to tell the House what business it has for the rest of this week and next week.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this afternoon we will continue second reading debate of Bill C-18, the Rouge National Urban Park legislation. The other bills on the agenda for today and tomorrow will be Bill C-25, the business framework legislation, and Bill C-30 regarding CETA. It is my hope that we can complete second reading debate on all these important bills by tomorrow afternoon if at all possible.

Next week, we will commence debate at report stage and third reading of Bill C-26 concerning the Canada pension plan. We will call this bill on Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday.

Finally, next Thursday, December 1 shall be the last allotted day for this supply cycle.

● (1510)

[Translation]

The Speaker: Order. I encourage members to take their conversations into the lobby.

The hon. member for Drummond.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[Translation]

ROUGE NATIONAL URBAN PARK ACT

The House resumed consideration of the motion that Bill C-18, An Act to amend the Rouge National Urban Park Act, the Parks Canada Agency Act and the Canada National Parks Act, be read the second time and referred to a committee.

Mr. François Choquette (Drummond, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise in the House today to speak to Bill C-18, an act to amend the Rouge National Urban Park Act, the Parks Canada Agency Act and the Canada National Parks Act.

We will support this bill at second reading because we generally support its fundamental principles. We have a few amendments to put forward in committee. However, in general, this bill is in line with what we requested.

This bill will remedy mistakes made in the past by the Conservatives, who haphazardly introduced a bill without consulting their provincial colleagues, in particular their Ontario colleagues, and without adequate consultation of environmental groups. This earned the ire and indignation of these groups and of the province. However, it did result in the creation of the Rouge Park, but it was not enough to allow us to address our needs and create a national urban park worthy of its designation.

As I said, Bill C-18 seeks to amend the Rouge National Urban Park Act, which was passed by the Conservatives during the last Parliament. Unfortunately, they did not set the bar very high when it comes to creating parks. On the contrary, they lowered the bar. These amendments will ensure that the preservation or reestablishment of ecological integrity by protecting natural resources and ecological processes will be the minister's priority in all aspects of park management.

Government Orders

This was one of the problems. At the time, the Conservatives explained their failure by saying that the creation of an urban national park was new territory. They felt that because this was out of the ordinary they did not need to focus on ecological integrity and therefore lowered the bar for conservation.

Of course, both environmental groups and the NDP said that this did not make sense, that we should rather invest in order to maintain strong, robust regulations on ecological integrity. This should have been one of the top criteria. Concessions to urban realities could be made later, but the ecological integrity criterion needed to be front and centre.

The other change that Bill C-18 makes is that it adds approximately 1,669 hectares of federal land to the Rouge National Urban Park. This will make it possible to have a collection of useful land with ecological integrity and a viable ecosystem, which is how it should have been from the start. Unfortunately, since the Conservatives could not seem to agree on a solid bill, they did not manage to obtain the land that was already protected and that belonged to the Province of Ontario at the time.

Finally, Bill C-18 also changes the boundaries of Wood Buffalo National Park in Alberta. This change will reduce the area of the park by 37 square kilometres in order to create the Garden River Indian Reserve. As such, the bill fulfills the promise that was made to the Little Red River Cree Nation, which is a very good thing.

The NDP wishes that the government would protect more land by creating more national parks using sound environmental legislation. We hope that the Rouge National Urban Park will be the first in a series of national parks in urban settings across Canada.

In fact, my NDP colleague from Alberta asked our Liberal colleagues a question about that in question period. She just got back from a mission to Marrakesh for the international conference on climate change, COP22. I know that she did an excellent job there representing Canada and the NDP's positions on addressing climate change.

• (1515)

All the work that needs to be done to protect and uphold first nations' rights is of course essential, so it is extremely important that we consult first nations.

The member said very little about how she plans to improve the situation. Unfortunately, the Canadian Environmental Assessment Act was amended in 2012. I was a member of the environment committee at the time, where I witnessed what I would call the gutting of the Canadian Environmental Assessment Act.

That legislation used to require adequate consultation, or at least more consultation than what is required today. It was sacrificed and handed over to the National Energy Board, which has expertise when it comes to energy, but not really when it comes to protecting the environment. We cannot ask the fox to guard the henhouse; it makes no sense. That is basically what happened. The government of the day put the fox in charge of the henhouse, as the NEB was asked to protect the environment. Well, that is not how it works.

During the election campaign, the Liberals promised to reform the environmental assessment process and said that no more major

projects would go through under the old Conservative process, a process they condemned then as they do now. For now, however, major projects are still being assessed according to the old Conservative process. Unfortunately, that promise was not kept.

That is why my Alberta colleague asked the government to keep that promise and ensure that our environmental assessments are worthy of the name. They were better when we had the Canadian Environmental Assessment Act, and they can be made even stronger and tougher.

Unfortunately, I do not know what is going on, but the Liberals are taking their sweet time on this issue. It is really awful because major projects, such as TransMontaigne Product Services LLC and energy east, are currently under review. People all over Quebec and in other parts of Canada are very worried about this, and they do not have much faith in the current process.

We asked for a rigorous, independent, science-based assessment, and we asked the government to start the energy east pipeline assessment over using a credible process. Unfortunately, the National Energy Board is assessing the project, and it has no intention of starting over. This is appalling.

That is why my colleague asked that question in the House today. We need a rigorous environmental assessment process for major projects, something we currently do not have.

We believe that the bill on the Rouge National Urban Park should give a clearer priority to ecological health and integrity, something the current bill does, so that we can focus on conservation.

We also need to think about all of the activities that could affect the park. Such activities are bound to take place there since, as has been mentioned, it is an urban park. My Conservative colleagues used that as an excuse not to focus on conservation.

Nevertheless, we can focus on conservation and study other activities that could potentially occur in the park because it is in an urban setting. For example, it makes sense for there to be agriculture and other similar activities that can also be subject to a strict environmental assessment. That goes without saying.

We also need a science-based management plan. In order to do that, the government needs to have the courage to review the Canada Environmental Assessment Act, as I mentioned before. It is not right that the National Energy Board is assessing major projects. That makes no sense.

Finally, there is a need for solid public and parliamentary oversight mechanisms.

• (1520)

These issues will be assessed by the Standing Committee on the Environment and Sustainable Development. I know that my colleague from Alberta sits on this committee and she will ensure that these provisions are assessed and given comprehensive consideration. I would also like to mention that my other colleague with an interest in parks has also done a very thorough job on this file in order to ensure that conservation and ecological integrity are front and centre in this bill.

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The New Democrats have been pushing for a long time for the Rouge National Urban Park to have the same legal protection as other national parks in Canada. We want the bill to establish a solid template for the creation of other national parks in urban settings.

We applaud the efforts made by people, all communities, environmental organizations, people living in the community around the Rouge National Park, and the Friends of Rouge National Urban Park. These people worked very hard for decades to ensure the creation of this very unique park. It will be the first national urban park in Canada.

Efforts are required to ensure everything goes well, however. I still remember very clearly how much work was done on this file by our former NDP colleague Rathika Sitsabaiesan, who was not reelected but is still working very hard. She introduced Bill C-696 to correct the flaws in the Conservative's bill on the Rouge national park. She worked very hard to correct the situation.

As the House can see, the NDP does not sit idly by. When we saw that this bill would neither make the park big enough nor ensure adequate conservation, we immediately introduced a private member's bill. That is how the NDP works. We are a collaborative party. We are a party that wants to make progress. We come up with solutions to problems.

That is what we want to keep doing in committee when this bill gets there. We have suggestions for improving and fine-tuning this bill. I hope the Liberals will agree to work on improving it.

I am happy that the Liberals are correcting, in some way, the Conservatives' mistakes in the Rouge National Urban Park bill. On the other hand, we have not heard much from them on the establishment of new national parks. In addition, we are not meeting our target for creating either land or marine protected areas.

I would like to talk about a very important marine protected area that has been at the project stage for almost 20 years. It is the St. Lawrence estuary marine protected area where the beluga whale's critical habitat is located. Belugas are not just a threatened species, because they now have species-at-risk status.

On May 14, 2016, the Liberal government published the project to determine the beluga whale's critical habitat in the *Canada Gazette*. If memory serves, the government has about 90 days after that to issue a ministerial order designating and protecting a critical habitat.

• (1525)

Today is November 24. More than 90 days have passed since May 14, and yet, we are still waiting.

When will we have regulation determining the beluga whale's critical habitat in the St. Lawrence?

Why are we not adding to that a project to establish marine protected areas in the St. Lawrence estuary? We have been waiting for 20 years. We do not want to end up with more problems such as those we faced when the Conservatives wanted to build an oil terminal right in the beluga nursery. It made no sense. In fact, the scientists all knew that and said so. Nevertheless, it was allowed to go ahead.

Our election platform stated that in the first six months of an NDP mandate, we would launch a very detailed project, in conjunction with the province of Quebec, to establish a marine protected area for the beluga whale. This is an important development that we want to see. I hope that the Liberal government will go ahead with it. In any case, it needs to get with the program concerning the ministerial order on the beluga's critical habitat; the deadline of May 14, 2016, has long since passed.

To summarize, the NDP is willing to work with the Liberals, and also with the Conservatives if they agree to change their attitude, to improve Bill C-18. It is already a very good bill, but it could be improved by doing what environmental groups are calling on us to do, which is to ensure that the Rouge park enjoys the same legal protection as other national parks.

In addition, we want to have the opportunity to propose a few amendments to make the bill stronger so that the framework it creates can serve as a template for the establishment of other national urban parks. We hope there will be others.

With regard to the Rouge National Urban Park, we want to give clear priority to environmental health and integrity as well as conservation.

We are aware that other activities are integral parts of the park, and we want them to be included, and to be subjected to thorough environmental assessments. We also want there to be a science-based management plan. Furthermore, we want the Liberals to present to us a short-term and long-term plan for the establishment of a new urban park, new national parks and marine protected areas.

If the recommendations of the 2017 Green Budget Coalition were accepted, we would have six national parks established by 2020, if memory serves. That would enable us to reach our targets, or at least come close.

Right now, the Liberals need to read the recommendations of the 2017 Green Budget Coalition. They contain many good ideas for achieving our conservation goals. Unfortunately, we are a long way from doing so at the moment.

[*English*]

Mr. Gary Anandasangaree (Scarborough—Rouge Park, Lib.):

Mr. Speaker, over the course of the debate, we have been hearing over and over again from our friends across the aisle about ecological integrity being an overriding principle of the park and that it should be removed because it impedes development of the park. Would my colleague tell us what more he thinks we need to do to ensure that ecological integrity is enshrined not just in this park, but parks across the country?

• (1530)

[*Translation*]

Mr. François Choquette: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague. I am sure that he is working very hard on this very important issue.

The Conservatives really dropped the ball on this file, in particular because they weakened the provisions on ecological integrity protection and conservation.

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On the other hand, I am wondering where my colleague stands on the Green Budget Coalition's recommendations, which include establishing at least six new national parks and three new national wildlife areas by 2020 and identifying new areas requiring protection through a plan based on science and traditional knowledge. This is extremely important.

It is a step in the right direction. It was vital to improve the legislation on the Rouge National Urban Park, because we could not afford to have weak criteria for urban parks. There may be other activities in the Rouge National Urban Park, such as agriculture, and thorough assessments to ensure that ecological integrity is maintained. I am therefore in agreement with my colleague on this. We must have a very rigorous legal framework.

Let us see what we can do in committee to ensure that this perspective is taken into consideration. The idea is first and foremost to make the ecological health and integrity of the Rouge National Urban Park a priority. That will ensure that we have a real park that is large enough to have a complete ecosystem.

[*English*]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have more of a comment than anything else, recognizing the effort of many of the different stakeholders who have made today possible. My colleague from Scarborough—Rouge Park has done yeoman's work in ensuring there is a clear understanding of just how important this park is.

I want to take the opportunity to expand upon how important parks, large and small alike, are to all Canadians. For example, I know how much we appreciate our river walk system in Winnipeg, and we want to see that expand.

Canadians seem to have a natural love of nature, and it is often best explored when we go to parks. I will leave it open-ended for my colleague across the way to provide his thoughts about the importance of having that park for Canadians in all regions, even though we recognize the Rouge park today.

[*Translation*]

Mr. François Choquette: Madam Speaker, the Rouge National Urban Park is extremely important, since it is about an hour's drive away for almost 20% of residents of the Greater Toronto Area. Everyone in the GTA will thus have ready access to the park. That too is important.

National parks are often remote and inaccessible, but this one is very close. People will be able to enjoy nature. It is increasingly important for people to get close to nature so that they can protect our environment more effectively.

We should note that in this park, there are 23 species considered at risk by the federal government, 800 species of plants and 55 species of fish. This demonstrates the richness of the park's ecosystem and the importance of protecting it.

On the other hand, I deplore once again the fact that the government has no comprehensive plan for achieving the Aichi targets, which are to preserve 17% of land areas and 10% of marine areas by 2020. We are a long way from that.

In addition, the Green Budget Coalition stated that the federal government should establish six new parks, and nothing has been done so far, unfortunately.

Mr. Robert Aubin (Trois-Rivières, NDP): Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague from Drummond for his always interesting comments on the environment. I am particularly pleased to ask him a question, since he knows a fair bit about my riding.

The bill that is before us today seems quite well designed for Rouge Park, but we would like it to serve as a template for future parks.

My colleague may know Saint-Quentin island, in my constituency. This island, situated in the very heart of the city, at the confluence of the St. Maurice and St. Lawrence rivers, in my view has all the necessary characteristics to become one of these other urban parks, if only for the diversity of its flora.

Does my colleague consider this island a territory worthy of being a national park? What are the provisions of Bill C-18 that impact Rouge Park and that could serve as a template for other parks?

• (1535)

Mr. François Choquette: Madam Speaker, I thank the hon. member for Trois-Rivières, who knows his region very well.

He mentions Saint-Quentin island. I go there regularly because it is such a lovely place. Citizens can go there to replenish themselves in nature and learn to know and observe the various resident species.

I am not perfectly knowledgeable about all the ecological richness to be found there. Making a national park of it someday is another question. But what is certain and important is that we must continue to protect the national asset that is Saint-Quentin island.

In my view, where new national urban parks are concerned, we must ensure that the bar is raised, not lowered, when it comes to conservation. Unfortunately that is what the Conservatives did with the Rouge National Park bill. They lowered the bar when they ought to have kept raising it.

I encourage my hon. colleague from Trois-Rivières to keep up his excellent work of promoting nature, and I encourage the people of Trois-Rivières to visit Saint-Quentin island, which is a true gem in the area.

[*English*]

Mr. Harold Albrecht (Kitchener—Conestoga, CPC): Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for his comments and recall fondly working with him on committee when we were studying this bill. He will remember very clearly that the term "ecological integrity" was one of the big sticking points.

In this bill, clause 2, subclause 6(1) has "maintenance or restoration of ecological integrity" as a priority and the very next clause says that nothing in this bill prevents the "carrying out of agricultural activities". It is pretty obvious that these two values are going to come into direct conflict with each other. My big concern is that when push comes to shove, the agricultural community will lose its voice.

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I wonder if my colleague is able to guarantee the House today that that will not happen and that agricultural practices that have been carried on for generations will continue. The agriculture committee heard from witnesses who said that their families have been farming since 1805, I believe it was. My concern is a reduction in the protection for agricultural producers in very rich farmland.

[*Translation*]

Mr. François Choquette: Madam Speaker, it was my great pleasure to sit on the Standing Committee on the Environment and Sustainable Development with my colleague. Even though we were not always in agreement, we could still collaborate on other subjects.

The member mentions something that was indeed a question and a concern on the part of the farmers. This has been expressed and underscored. What is important to remember is that these things are not mutually exclusive. It is important to make ecological integrity a priority, but it is also important to allow other activities that have been around since the 19th century, as he says. I am thinking of agriculture, for example. We just need to make sure we have a rigorous environmental study when those activities are maintained. The two, then, are not mutually exclusive, quite the opposite. I would even say that the two are mutually beneficial when their environment is improved.

[*English*]

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Madam Speaker, it is a pleasure for me to be able to rise today to discuss this important bill, Bill C-18, which deals with Rouge Park, a bill that makes some amendments to some work that was done under the previous government; and, in the context of this bill to talk about some important underlying principles in terms of the way we deal with and manage parks within the context of preserving the environment, and relate that back to some of the things happening in my own constituency as well.

What I want to do to start is share a bit about a national park near my own constituency, really as a way of building into some broader principles around environmental preservation.

My constituency, Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, is just east of Edmonton. It borders with Elk Island National Park, which is just outside of the riding and it is to the east side of Strathcona county right on the border. Elk Island National Park is 35 kilometres east of Edmonton. It is fairly easy to access along the Yellowhead Highway, so I encourage any members who are in the area to take advantage of visiting Elk Island National Park. It is Canada's eighth-smallest park in area, but it is actually the largest fully enclosed national park. It has an area of close to 200 square kilometres, so it is an interesting place in that context. There are plenty of opportunities for camping, and the park has a mix of different kinds of prairie ecosystems.

In terms of the unique history of this park and in terms of the principles that I want to draw out of it for this debate, the history is very closely linked to the story of the preservation of bison within western Canada.

Historically, before European contact there were vast bison populations on the western prairies. Bison were very important for the livelihood of indigenous people, and there are stories of early wagon trains going through the west, and for days on end the people constantly seeing bison and always being in their line of sight.

Regarding the early relationship that our indigenous people had with bison, part of what was interesting to me was that at one point in time they did not use horses for hunting at all. They had to develop innovative techniques for hunting bison, and in some cases that involved great personal risk because they did not have the safety associated with being up on a horse. After the time of European contact there was a significant decline in the bison population as a result of over-hunting and this sort of thing, and the way in which the animals were used which was quite different from how they were used by the indigenous communities.

The story of Elk Island National Park is closely tied to the restoration of plains bison in the area. It was an important place for preserving habitat, a space for bison to live. In 2007, when the last estimate was done in terms of numbers in the area, there were about 300 wood bison in the park. This is not a huge number, but certainly an important number, and an important step for the preservation of an important part of our ecological history and of our human history in terms of the relationship that our indigenous communities and subsequent settler communities had with bison. We have taken a large step back from where we were in terms of population but at the same time, in the 20th century we have seen significant progress.

There is an important underlying point here about the history of Elk Island National Park, which is relevant very much to the discussion we are having about Rouge Park and the way in which we understand the human relationship to that park in the context of an urban environment. Some people would take a negative view of all human interaction with the environment. They would almost go so far as to describe the human relationship with the natural environment as being parasitic, but that is obviously not reflective of reality. There are many cases of human interaction with nature not harming nature, where resources can be managed well and where a proper balance can be struck that benefits all and has a positive impact on conservation.

● (1540)

I spoke, in the context of bison in western Canada, about how the resource was well-managed by indigenous people, and subsequent efforts in the 20th century in terms of conservation and trying to bring back some population of bison. The attempts did not always work, and there were hiccups along the way in terms of efforts at conservation. That is clear from the specific history of Elk Island National Park.

However, human interaction with nature is not a negative. We are part of nature and we can make a positive contribution to the environment that we are in. Human beings are an important part of the natural world. We are not the problem. I regard nature as a good but not a good that is in inevitable conflict with a belief in the dignity and importance of a human being as part of nature and the importance and legitimacy of using nature to meet our immediate and long-term needs. There is nothing wrong with recognizing an appreciation of the value that nature provides while also recognizing the legitimacy of the human use of the natural environment to meet our immediate as well as our long-term benefits.

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I do not often refer directly to Catholic social teaching in this House, but I think it provides an interesting and unique perspective when it comes to understanding the roots of a cohesive, robust, pro-human environmentalism. I would encourage all members in this House who have a particular interest in environmental issues to take a look at Pope Francis's still relatively recent environmental encyclical where he talks about environmental preservation. The title is *Laudato Si*. I do not agree with everything in it, but at the same time I see it as an insightful and original reflection on environmental protection. It is not quite what most of either its proponents or its detractors perhaps described it as in some of the heated media conversations that followed its release.

Let me share a few quotes from it that speak to at least a certain kind of perspective on environmentalism that I think is worth reflecting on.

It states:

Human beings too are creatures of this world, enjoying a right to life and happiness, and endowed with unique dignity. So we cannot fail to consider the effects on people's lives of environmental deterioration, current models of development and the throwaway culture.

This is another instance. It states:

Our insistence that each human being is an image of God should not make us overlook the fact that each creature has its own purpose. [Nothing] is superfluous. The entire material universe speaks of God's love, his boundless affection for us. Soil, water, mountains: everything is, as it were, a caress of God. The history of our friendship with God is always linked to particular places which take on an intensely personal meaning; we all remember places, and revisiting those memories does us much good. Anyone who has grown up in the hills or used to sit by the spring to drink, or played outdoors in the neighbourhood square; going back to these places is a chance to recover something of [our] true[er] selves.

I will read a couple more quotes that I think are interesting and instructive.

It states:

An integral ecology is inseparable from the notion of the common good, a central and unifying principle of social ethics. The common good is "the sum of those conditions of social life which allow social groups and their individual members relatively thorough and ready access to their own fulfilment".

This is the final instance. It states:

Human ecology also implies another profound reality: the relationship between human life and the moral law, which is inscribed in our nature and is necessary for the creation of a more dignified environment. Pope Benedict XVI spoke of an "ecology of man", based on the fact that "man too has a nature that he must respect and that he cannot manipulate at will". It is enough to recognize that our body itself establishes us in a direct relationship with the environment and with other living beings. The acceptance of our bodies as God's gift is vital for welcoming and accepting the entire world as a gift from the Father and our common home, whereas thinking that we enjoy absolute power over our own bodies turns, often subtly, into thinking that we enjoy absolute power over creation.

Those are a few quotes from that document. I know that many members here will perhaps disagree with some of the fundamental philosophical presumptions there, but I think those quotes and the broader document present us with an interesting way of thinking about a kind of integrated and balanced environmentalism, one that recognizes the good that exists in nature and the importance of preserving and protecting it.

• (1545)

It should also be one that recognizes the natural and proper place within it of human beings and how human beings can and should

enjoy nature, make legitimate use of it, and seek its preservation. We are not alien to the natural world. We are very much part of it. There is a continuum in terms of respecting the dignity of individuals and the value of the natural world we inhabit.

To summarize, some discourse around environmental issues suggests that we should be able to do whatever we want with the environment. This ignores the value inherent in nature and the benefits to human beings that accrue from nature. The other extreme, which denies any human engagement with or use of the environment, fails to recognize the importance of the common good, the well-being of human beings in that context, the place of humans within the natural environment, and the way in which we can facilitate conservation and the improvement of the environment.

That is the intellectual context of my perspective on the environment. Let us talk specifically about the history of Rouge Park, because the creation of urban parks speaks very specifically to another concern raised in *Laudato Si*, which is the fact that people in urban areas may not have the same opportunities to engage with nature as people perhaps in other times or people in rural areas. Not everyone has easy access to the wilderness parks we have at points today discussed.

The creation of urban parks is, in a particular sense, for the people in and around them. This is evident in the vision, in terms of the creation of Rouge Park, that we would preserve natural spaces and the beauty of nature inside, or in very close proximity to, urban settings. This enables the enjoyment of nature, the use and observation of nature, and the personal enrichment that comes from being present in nature by people who live in urban centres. Obviously, the proximity to Toronto means that a very large population of people in that area have access to that park. They are really going to benefit from the decision the previous government took in terms of proceeding with the creation of this urban park.

I am proud of the Conservative government's record with regard to moving forward with the establishment of this park and the significant dollars invested in it. This is Canada's first nationally protected urban park.

I will provide a few facts about Rouge Park. The park is on the border of Pickering and Toronto. It is about 50 square kilometres, and as has been noted by my colleagues, compares favourably to other urban parks. It is 19 times larger than Stanley Park, 22 times larger than Central Park in New York, and close to 50 times larger than High Park in Toronto. It protects about 12% of the Rouge River watershed. It is a beautiful area. My dad actually grew up in Scarborough, and my grandparents lived there until quite recently, so I am somewhat familiar with the area.

When we talk about an urban park, we are not talking about untouched wilderness. We are dealing with land with different kinds of uses, such as agricultural uses. We are not talking about a wilderness park, as might be the case with certain other national parks that exist.

When we look at the decision of the government, through this amendment, to introduce language on ecological integrity, there is legitimate concern on our side of the House about the implication of this for those important principles in terms of human engagement and interaction with the natural world, which is the purpose of having this urban park. It is not the only purpose, I should say. It is one of the purposes, which is the human experience of the natural world and the human benefit from it as well as the continuation of those other important uses, such as agriculture.

It is interesting to listen to the speeches government members have made maybe seeking to clarify that ecological integrity is not in any way intended to create a problem for the agricultural use of some of the land in the park.

•(1550)

We have to think not only about the good intentions, which I am sure exist, of members in this House but about what that terminology actually means and could be interpreted to mean going forward. From many of the comments government members have made, it sounds like what they would like to see in the park, in some sense, is the preservation of the status quo uses of the land, perhaps with ecological advancements in the sense of the increasingly effective use of the land, from an ecological perspective, but in a way that continues in the mode of the existing uses.

I agree that there are ecological ways of farming. It is part of the natural and proper interaction between people and the natural environment. However, I think government members should acknowledge the concern that using that word introduces some potential problems in terms of how this park is going to be understood and how it is going to be used in the future.

Indeed, we have seen from governments before that what starts as maybe a well-intentioned phrase may move in the direction, subsequently, of expropriation and efforts at reforestation and other things that would not be sensible uses of the land in the context in which it has been set aside as an urban park.

The language risks creating that slippery slope. That is why I think it is important that we address this issue and do everything we can to preserve and strengthen the park but recognize that it is to be a place for interaction, for a meeting of people with nature.

I should say, as well, that this is part of the broader vision for national parks. Obviously, that is walked out in different contexts. Maybe the way people are interacting with nature in a wilderness park is going to be different and perhaps more limited than in an urban park. However, it is important, even for getting general public buy-in, support, and appreciation for the value of nature, that we maintain these opportunities for interaction. I would be concerned about the way ecological integrity is defined and the way it could be used in the present and in the future.

I believe the principle here is that parks have to entail a balance between the non-human, natural uses, the preservation of the environment, and the use of areas by human beings for their own well-being and the advancement of the social common good.

As Conservatives, we very much believe in the environment, and we advocate a balance. We advocate a balance with an eye to the economy, and more broadly speaking, with an eye to the common

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good, with a recognition of the value of the natural world and the value of the interaction between people and the natural world.

I think about the policies of the government in general with respect to the environment. I can say that in many cases, they may reflect a laudable goal, which is the advancement and protection of the environment, but they do so in a way that is out of balance with the human dimension and the need for the protection of the social common good.

The good intentions may not always be there. It may just be an excuse to talk about the environment when the government is undertaking measures that are not related to the environment. I am willing to assume that at least for many of the government members, there are good intentions there.

I think about the situation in my own province of Alberta. In the name of the environment, we have the imposition of significant new taxes that are going to be deeply injurious to the common good and deeply injurious to the well-being of people who are trying to get jobs and are trying to get on their feet. We can see the negative consequences of job losses and even the expansion of social challenges for people that result from job loss.

The government is presiding over these problems, yet it is imposing new taxes simply on the basis of an environmentalism that I would submit is disconnected from these broader questions of human good.

As we talk about Rouge Park, as we think about the situation in my home province, as we think about our broader perspective on the environment, let us remember the importance of an integrated perspective, one that considers the environmental good in the context of the common good, the social common good, and the economic common good. Those things do not have to be in conflict with each other. Indeed, they can work together. However, when we see policies that are out of balance, it is important for us, as the opposition, to object and call us back to a more balanced approach.

•(1555)

Mr. Gary Anandasangaree (Scarborough—Rouge Park, Lib.):

Madam Speaker, I thank my friend for those comments. He and I have worked together on a couple of issues over the year, and I always look forward to his comments. I look forward to him visiting Scarborough—Rouge Park in the near future.

The member talked about a lack of protection or that maybe we have gone too far in protecting the environment with respect to the park. What it really comes down to is that the stakeholders I have spoken to and the community organizations that have worked on this issue for the last three or four decades have overwhelmingly said that we need to have ecological integrity for the park enshrined in the legislation. This is why our Minister of Environment and Climate Change undertook an extensive consultation process with the parties involved and came up with this bill.

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I think it is important for my friend to recognize that this is the only park that would not have ecological integrity enshrined in the legislation if we do not bring these amendments. Every national park in the country has ecological integrity, but this does not. I think it is important for my friend to recognize that this is an important element that the community has asked for, and the government is responding to those needs.

• (1600)

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Madam Speaker, first of all, I thank my friend for the invitation to Scarborough—Rouge Park. I will be happy to take him up on that at some point. I am sure the Conservative electoral district association there is looking forward to setting up some door-knocking for me.

With respect to the member's comments about what the community is looking for, the reality is that the concerns we have been raising are not just concerns we have. I will share something that was said at the environment committee in 2014. This is from Mr. Ian Buchanan, the manager of natural heritage and forestry, environmental promotion and protection in the Regional Municipality of York, who is clearly an important stakeholder in this discussion. He said:

The biggest threat would be picking the wrong end point, as was mentioned. Ecosystem health is a “yes”, but ecological integrity is unrealistic.

We have an important stakeholder, and this is just one example of someone coming before the environment committee. I think this is along the lines of what I was talking about.

We can certainly agree that preserving the health of ecosystems is important and that, obviously, preserving the natural environment is a core part of the purpose of the park. However, if we were to head in the direction of ecological integrity, it is unrealistic. Potentially, in terms of its interpretation, it could create some significant problems down the line, whether it is for the agricultural use of that land or other kinds of uses, so—

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): We will go to questions and comments.

I understand that people are very passionate about this topic, but this is questions and comments and not elaborate speeches. We have already been through that. I just want the member to keep that in mind.

The hon. member for Regina—Lewvan.

Mr. Erin Weir (Regina—Lewvan, NDP): Madam Speaker, the member for Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan is eminently sensible in suggesting that we must strike a balance between protecting the environment and the human use of our environment. I wonder if he would acknowledge that part of that balance is having certain areas, such as national parks, in which we really do err on the side of protecting and preserving nature.

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Madam Speaker, I have been called many things by NDP members, but that is the first time for “eminently sensible”.

To respond to what the member said about national parks, we all agree in the House on the importance of preserving national parks. However, I would say that the way in which we protect nature in different kinds of national parks is going to be different. Our

approach in Banff, Jasper, or Elk Island National Park, near my own constituency, which I talked about, is going to be different from our approach in an urban park.

Yes, ecosystem health and the preservation of ecosystems is important, but there are going to be different kinds of uses. There are multiple purposes that exist in a national park. I think we can have our cake and eat it too here, but that does not involve the language of “ecological integrity”, in my view.

Mr. Mel Arnold (North Okanagan—Shuswap, CPC): Madam Speaker, I thank the member for Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan for his commentary. It has been really interesting to listen to it all day.

I come from British Columbia. There are some instances where protecting ecological integrity has not necessarily ended up being in the best interests of the park or the public. I will speak to that a bit later when I elaborate on the spread of the pine beetle from Tweedsmuir Provincial Park, across B.C., and now into Alberta.

Does the member have examples of similar situations where park managers' hands have sometimes been tied because ecological integrity has been the priority?

• (1605)

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for his intervention and look forward to hearing more details in his speech later on.

Certainly he makes a very important point. There are some cases where the management of the natural environment, in order to preserve the well-being of those ecosystems, might be at odds with the “just leave it alone the way it is, untouched” kind of approach. Sometimes the preservation of those ecosystems may point in a different direction from what might be implied by “ecological integrity”, leaving things the way they normally are.

I have quoted specific references from the environment committee to those concerns. I spoke about Elk Island National Park near my own constituency, where the engagement of people for the preservation and protection of the bison herd certainly was important.

The underlying theme of what I am trying to get across is that there is a legitimacy to that interaction between people and the environment, which could have positive effects for the environment as well as for individuals. We should not always assume that human non-engagement with nature is better. There are many cases in which that engagement is certainly better for the human beings doing the engaging and which could also have positive effects on the natural environment in question.

[Translation]

Mr. François Choquette (Drummond, NDP): Madam Speaker, in his speech, my colleague mentioned the importance of ensuring a certain balance. However, we are talking here about a national park where integrity should be the priority. That does not mean that there cannot be other activities there.

Government Orders

As certain Conservative colleagues have pointed out, agriculture has been practised there for decades now—centuries, even. Consequently, the other activities simply have to be subjected to a rigorous environmental assessment process. They can still continue to coexist despite the presence of a national park where ecological health and integrity are the priority.

We understand full well that exceptions may happen and accommodations may need to be taken. That is what the new bill states, whereas the previous one completely did away with ecological integrity and health. Many witnesses, who have not been named, spoke about the importance of ecological integrity and health. It was not just one witness; many others said the opposite.

[*English*]

Mr. Garnett Genuis: Madam Speaker, regarding the member's comments that yes, this is a national park and thus there is a certain standard that should exist, I am very comfortable with the fact that there are different kinds of national parks that exist in different kinds of environments, where different kinds of approaches may be more realistic or more appropriate.

When we are talking about wilderness parks, absolutely, there is a certain approach that makes sense in that context. However, when we are talking about an urban park, it is very likely that a somewhat different approach is required to be realistic when it comes to ecological integrity.

The balance struck in different kinds of national parks will likely be different depending on the specific objectives and the specific environment.

It sounds like my colleague agrees that other activities have to be preserved, such as the continuing agricultural use of parts of that park. That is very much what we are talking about: striking a balance, in terms of the language we use, that is not going to create problems for those other uses down the line.

Mr. Blaine Calkins (Red Deer—Lacombe, CPC): Madam Speaker, let me preface my comments by letting folks in the House and those who may be watching know that I was very proud in a previous life to serve as a conservation officer in the province of Alberta. I served at a variety of provincial parks. In fact, when I last served at a provincial park I was the in-charge officer for that provincial park. I also had the privilege of being a national park warden for Parks Canada in 1995. It seems like a long time ago. I also had the privilege of being a backcountry warden on the north boundary of Jasper National Park. I had several horses and seven cabins that I would stay at as I patrolled. I was able to live at the Decoigne Warden Station during my free time, while it was still a warden station.

I have a zoology degree in fisheries and aquatic sciences, and a conservation law enforcement diploma from Lethbridge College, designed specifically for a career in parks, fisheries, and wildlife, and working as a law enforcement officer in the conservation field. I did not spend a lot of time doing that, just a number of years in my 20s. I was successful at it for a while. Of course, that kind of work is seasonal work for the most part when starting out, so I was thrilled to have the opportunity to work in the oil patch in the wintertime. As a farm boy in Alberta, one could pretty much walk in and get a job in any oil company. If one knew how to use a wrench, one was hired. I

thank the companies in the energy sector for supporting my parks habit in my 20s, because I loved to work in parks, but needed the money that the energy sector provided. The energy sector is suffering so badly right now in my home province. My heart goes out to my constituents who I know are struggling mightily with what is transpiring there.

However, I am digressing. I need to get back to the issue before the House today.

Some people in the House will be surprised to find that, given my background, I am not going to stand here and advocate for a national urban park in the greater Toronto area. It is not because I do not believe in the value of national parks. As I said, I dedicated a portion of my life to them, and most of my education has gone into that. However, I understand the culture of Parks Canada. I am not saying it is a bad culture. I am not saying it is negative. I need people to understand what they are getting with Parks Canada. They are getting an organization that believes in its mandate wholeheartedly. That is a good thing. That is not a negative thing. However, in a country that is almost 150 years old, there is a reason that not a single national urban park was created until this park was.

If we look at Parks Canada and what Canada is known for in its national parks, it is known usually for broad landscapes. It is protecting vast amounts of land and protecting areas, whether those be marine protected areas, or mountainous regions, like Alberta, or vast tracts of land in Yukon, the Northwest Territories, or Gros Morne in Newfoundland and Labrador. All of these parks are usually set aside far away from urban areas. The reason for that is that human and natural conflicts are sometimes difficult to manage. I am going to speak a little about this.

I have been a member of Parliament for a long time. It will be 11 years pretty soon. Some people on this side of the House would think I have a long future ahead of me. Some people on that side of the House would probably encourage me to think of other things. That is fine. I get that. I truly do.

I have been an MP in Alberta, and I have had the good fortune of doing that for a long time. I used to represent the community of Rocky Mountain House, with its national historic site and its proximity along highway 11 to the Saskatchewan crossing and highway 93 between Lake Louise and Jasper.

● (1610)

I had dealings with all of the people there, whether someone operating a ski hill who simply wanted to build a small maintenance building to augment their services, or those involved in something as broad as expanding the size of a ski hill to accommodate tourists and guests.

Government Orders

I spent most of my summer holidays with my family in Waterton Lakes National Park and Jasper National Park. I returned to that national park I had worked in so long ago because I love it. I knew what the deal was going to be when I went there and I received the deal. People were constantly telling me that the tire on my truck was a bit off the gravel pad and on the grass, that I would have to move it. They would tell me that I had left my empty cooler outside and that I would have to get it. They would come into my campsite and take away things. They did not know me. They did not know that I knew what I was doing. They assumed that I was like everyone else in the park, that I might or might not be skilled in doing these things.

The people of the GTA need to understand that with its mandate, Parks Canada will micromanage everything that happens in that park, especially the people.

What I am concerned about is the fact that four million people are in the immediate area. The bill currently before the House talks about preserving the ecological integrity of a parcel of land that is a mere 79 square kilometres in size. I have news for everyone: If this legislation passes and the protection and preservation of ecological integrity becomes the mandate of Rouge National Urban Park, I promise everyone watching today that there will be complaints and conflicts between the people living near, living in, doing business with, or having anything to do with that national park. The mandate of Parks Canada and the protection and preservation of ecological integrity will not sit well in a 79-hectare park with houses right up against it and with virtually no buffer zone around it. It is important to understand this.

Jasper National Park and Banff National Park are themselves not islands alone surrounded by development. There is Kootenay National Park and Yoho National Park right across the border. There is the Willmore Wilderness Park, the White Goat Wilderness Area, and Kananaskis Provincial Park, as well as all kinds of other provincial parks, municipal parks, and crown land surrounding those national parks. Those national parks, when compared to Rouge National Urban Park, are geographically massive, and yet Parks Canada still struggles with managing ecological integrity.

Caribou migrate massive distances, but because there is an ecological and hands-off approach, letting natural systems take their course, even in a park surrounded by the Willmore where there is no ATV traffic, caribou still have a hard time surviving. There are basically similar rules to what we see in a national park. Provincial parks and recreational areas are all around it. However, even in a park that size, caribou, which are not threatened by oil and gas activity and not threatened by forestry activity, still have a hard time surviving because, when ecological integrity is preserved, natural systems take care of themselves. Thus the presence of wolves and mountain lions in an uncontrolled, non-predator controlled environment such as a national park has led to the virtual extirpation of caribou from Jasper National Park. They are not hunted. Aboriginals are not hunting in Jasper National Park. They are not exercising those rights there. It is not oil and gas activity. It is not forestry activity and it is not even forestry activity all around it, because all around that park are buffer zones that prevent those same kinds of activities. Yet we cannot actually preserve the integrity of a species in its range even in a park of that size.

● (1615)

How on earth is Parks Canada going to manage a conflict should cougars, black bears or other types of large predatory animals find their way into the Rouge National Park where they would be afforded all the protections of the National Parks Act, which is exactly what this bill intends to do? I am saying straight up that the current Parks Canada mandate will not work well in an urban national park surrounded by four million people. This is a fool's errand. It will be expensive, it will be frustrating, and it will not work.

Parks Canada can get into memorandums of understanding with landowners, but I know the culture of Parks Canada. Parks Canada officials do not want human activity in a national park. It is that simple. People can say whatever they want, but I can assure the people watching and the people in the House that Parks Canada officials want little to no human activity in a national park. That is the culture. I am not saying it is right. I am not saying it is wrong. I am saying that is the way it is. I have been there. I have done that. I know it.

What is going to happen? How do we provide ecological integrity in a park that is 79 kilometres square in its size, hardly bigger than some family farms in places like Saskatchewan and Alberta on the Prairies? What is going to happen when the beavers get into the waterway and decide to dam things up, and people have to go through the paperwork and the process or a national park warden has to make the call where public safety is an imminent threat to kill the beaver? They cannot protect that ecological integrity.

What about insect infestations? What about crop management for farmers asking for the privilege of putting a herbicide or pesticide on their crop inside a national park which has the mandate to provide for ecological integrity? They cannot circle that square. Something has got to give. Alan Latourelle knows this very well. He wrote a letter saying that this would not work, as he was leaving after 13 years at the helm of Parks Canada. He said not to do it, not to go that extra step.

Parks Canada has other stages of parks. We have park reserves. We have land that is being held in trust for parks. We can simply change the regulations and the law to allow for the uniqueness of an urban national park. We can take all of the policies that generally come out of an urban park in any of our cities. I am sure the city of Toronto has them. I know the city of Edmonton did when I worked for Edmonton parks and recreation. Virtually every city has its own rules and its own policies for the parks inside city limits, because those are the rules and policies that make sense in a city.

Government Orders

What is going to happen when there is an insect infestation? What is going to happen if that insect infestation is either destroying the crops of the farmer, threatening the neighbourhood, threatening the trees and other physical improvements that the city has put in place in proximity to that park, or private landowners who have spent money on cherry trees, orchards, fruit trees or whatever they have in their backyard? When they tell the MPs in Toronto that they have a bug problem in their backyard coming from the national park and ask them what they going to do about it, MPs from the GTA are going to do nothing about it. They are not going to be able to do anything.

Members should trust me. I know what I am talking about. They cannot change the law all by themselves. Therefore, they are going to have to look their constituents in the eye and say that the member of Parliament for Red Deer—Lacombe, in a speech eight years ago, warned about this, but they did not listen to him and voted in favour of the government bill, and now wished they had listened. It is coming. They do not have to believe me if they do not want to, but it is coming.

• (1620)

There nothing anybody is going to be able to do about it because Parks Canada is going to say, no, that the ecological integrity has to be maintained, that the insect is naturally occurring in this area, and if it spreads out of the park's boundaries, so be it.

Members may not believe me, but Parks Canada has a much more enforced mandate than provincial parks. Anybody can understand these three words “mountain pine beetle”. The NDP government of the day in British Columbia did not understand that if it did override the ecological integrity provisions of the B.C. Parks Act, which is less onerous than the National Parks Act, it could have gone in and extirpated the infestation of mountain pine beetles in Tweedsmuir Provincial Park. I know my colleague is going to talk about this later. It could have saved the ecological integrity of virtually tens of thousands of square kilometres of pine trees all through British Columbia, Alberta, and now into Saskatchewan, even the ones in the national parks like Jasper.

That is what it would have been able to do, but the NDP government could not do it, or it would not do it. It let nature take its course. It was billions of dollars to the forestry industry, bailouts, and fighting this pine beetle scourge as it moved across from B.C. through Alberta and across the north. Had there been a different mandate or a provision that would have allowed for common sense and management of these lands in an appropriate way, we might have been able to prevent this problem.

Parks Canada changed its mandate a long time ago. I used to ride my horses through the back country of Jasper National Park. Some of it was on trails. Some of these trails looked awfully sculpted. When I inquired what they were, they were old fire roads. Parks Canada used to have a fire suppression policy, where it would go in and protect the forest because the forests were beautiful.

People cannot dispute that when they drive through a national park, or through a forest management area or some crown land, and we have plenty of that close to us, whether it is nearby Quebec or northern Ontario, it is beautiful. Driving along the highway and

seeing the boreal forest, whether it is in the Shield or wherever the case might be, is absolutely lovely.

This summer, my family and I went back to Jasper, and we drove up the Maligne Canyon. A fire broke out in the Maligne Canyon last year. It was a beautiful picturesque landscape. On basically three sides of that canyon, it is scorched earth, right down to the rocks. The fire burned so hot that it actually burned through all of the forest. Normally a forest fire just burns the canopy and goes through and kills the trees, but this bared it right down to the rocks. That is how hot and intense that fire actually was.

Forest fires are natural. We were not going to harvest the trees in the national park anyway. They tried to suppress the fire simply to protect the physical assets and infrastructure, such as buildings, businesses, and so on in the area. That is the only reason they got involved.

The fire suppression policy is going to apply unless a specific exemption is made in Rouge National Urban Park. Which MPs here are going to say that they wished they could have told people that they could have saved their homes when the fire broke out at a picnic site in Rouge National Urban Park, but they voted in favour of the ecological integrity provisions for an urban national park next to four million people.

If members do not think a fire can get out of control and affect a city, they should look at Fort McMurray or Slave Lake in my province. It is not funny at all. This is serious business. I would love to keep going. If I could have just a few seconds—

• (1625)

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): The member will be able to conclude during the questions and comment period.

Questions and comments, the hon. member for Ottawa South.

• (1630)

Mr. David McGuinty (Ottawa South, Lib.): Madam Speaker, my colleague and I have served together on a number of committees, but that was probably the most defeatist speech I have heard here in a decade.

There is always a way forward. This is a negotiated outcome involving three orders of government, hundreds of stakeholders, and residents. The concept of ecological integrity is one that we are struggling with not only in urban settings, urban parks, but in no-go zones, parks that have been created where there is very little human traffic or presence. The fact that it is going to be difficult to achieve does not in any way, shape, or form, for me, suggest we ought not to try.

Already, in the last 12 months, Parks Canada has completed 15 major ecological restoration projects, including farmland enhancement and scientific research projects. We are just beginning to move forward. The fact that there are four million or five million people in the area is actually a positive thing. We are trying to mainstream this concept of ecological integrity throughout Canadian society.

Government Orders

Mr. Blaine Calkins: Madam Speaker, in principle, I do not disagree. Rouge Park is a tremendous opportunity to use as an educational facility, to engage many Canadians who, and I do not know if I am right on this, in our larger urban centres might be a little disconnected from our natural environment. I applaud the notion that my colleague brings forward. I am simply relaying to him my personal experiences in dealing with a Government of Canada agency, a Government of Canada agency for which I proudly worked. I am not bashing the agency. I am not bashing the people who work there. They are doing fantastic work according to their mandate.

My concern is that the House does not truly understand how the mandate is implemented. In an area where there is so much opportunity for contentious uses of that very small land space, there will be many bumps along the road. I am just suggesting that we had better not put some more bumps in it by adding ecological integrity at this time.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Robert Aubin (Trois-Rivières, NDP): Madam Speaker, I listened very carefully to my hon. colleague's speech, as he is an expert on the subject. I, myself, am not, so I rely on a variety of sources to improve my understanding of the issue.

I understand what he is saying, but when I compare it, say, with the comments made by Mr. Éric Hébert-Daly, national executive director of the Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society, CPAWS, I note some inconsistencies.

Mr. Hébert-Daly said, "CPAWS also welcomes the greater certainty for the farming community that is proposed in this bill. It shows that, with some creative thinking, solutions can be found that work for farming and for conservation of the precious Rouge ecosystem."

It would seem, then, that we are not alone in thinking that it is possible for these things to coexist.

My question is very simple. What amendments would my colleague propose in order to make the bill acceptable to him?

[*English*]

Mr. Blaine Calkins: Madam Speaker, I will simply ask if anybody knows of any national park in Canada that allows farmers to start up operations and farm the land inside a national park. No, that is not happening.

We are starting a national park that currently has farming operations in it, with an organization that has no mandate. In fact, it has an opposite mandate when it comes to agricultural practices. They are diametrically opposed. The culture and management start with the minister and deputy ministers in Ottawa, all the way down. Alan Latourelle, the head of Parks Canada for 13 years, a distinguished career, said that he disagreed with including the provision of ecological integrity in the mandate of Rouge National Park. That is good enough for me. I do not understand why it is not good enough for the rest in the House.

• (1635)

Mrs. Cathy McLeod (Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo, CPC): Madam Speaker, I listened carefully and with interest. My colleague talked about how urban parks are somewhat different.

Coming from British Columbia, we have Stanley Park in Vancouver. Trip Advisor just acknowledged it as the best park in the world. It is an urban park. It was described as "evolution as a forest and urban space". It tries to ensure ecological integrity but it is not built into the finiteness of its mandate. Therefore, I would like my colleague to talk about how Vancouver has managed to protect this incredibly beautiful park but allowed it to change as people change, for example, whether it is an aquarium and what we are going to do with aquariums. It is a beautiful park without the restrictiveness of the Parks Canada kind of mandate.

Mr. Blaine Calkins: Madam Speaker, I believe what the member is getting at is that for every park, whatever level of government is looking after it, be it municipal or provincial, it aspires to leave it in its best possible natural state, allowing trees to grow, and the like. I have been to Stanley Park and in some parts of it the grass is mowed, there are paved trails, and so on. I am not saying these things do not happen in national parks, I am saying that the process by which these things happen is completely different.

If the City of Vancouver needs to do something in Stanley Park, it does not have a legally mandated objective of preserving ecological integrity, of going through an ecological impact assessment on something as simple as putting in a new washroom or doing something like that. Parks Canada is a very bureaucratic organization. That is fine. I am not saying one way or the other if that is good or bad. However, it has a mandate for ecological integrity that takes priority over all of the other needs and wishes of the people who would be using the park. That would be the difference between Stanley Park in Vancouver and Stanley national park in Vancouver. If the Stanley Park in Vancouver became a national park, in a little while we would not recognize it as Stanley Park or what its intent would be. I am not saying one is better than the other, I am saying those are choices, and we had better be sure about what those choices actually are and what they mean.

Mr. Adam Vaughan (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister (Intergovernmental Affairs), Lib.): Madam Speaker, I appreciate clearly the exposure, experience, and concern that the colleague opposite has expressed with respect to this. I would ask the House to reflect on the fact that this is an urban park in a part of the urban fabric that is currently unique and wild unto itself. While it shares some of the characteristics of the parks referenced, it does not share the characteristics of the quantity of animal wildlife or the complexity of the ecosystem, largely because it is surrounded entirely by urban fabric. Does that not mitigate some of the concerns that have been raised?

Mr. Blaine Calkins: Madam Speaker, quite contrarily, it actually exacerbates the issue that I have just raised. Because the mandate that is to be imposed on an urban park is actually for non-urban parks, we are trying to put a square peg in a round hole, and good luck.

The Assistant Deputy Speaker (Mrs. Carol Hughes): Before we resume debate, 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 Regina—Lewvan, Public Services and Procurement; the hon. member for Selkirk—Interlake—Eastman, Foreign Affairs; the hon. member for Hochelaga, Housing.

Government Orders

•(1640)

Mrs. Cathy McLeod (Kamloops—Thompson—Cariboo, CPC): Madam Speaker, I will be sharing my time with the member for North Okanagan—Shuswap.

I have been in the House all day today for this debate. The people who would be listening might think the debate is strictly about the Rouge National Urban Park. It is certainly a very important piece of the debate and something I think most of our Ontario colleagues have been focused on, but there are actually another couple of elements to this.

I will be focusing on the Wood Buffalo component, but I want to take a broader look at our national park system. As Canadians, we can be proud of our national park system. There is a plan, which is really looking at the 39 different ecosystems and getting national parks into every area of our natural regions across the country, coast to coast to coast. We are 60% of the way toward getting that job done. Certainly when we were in government, supporting the Rouge National Urban Park was something we did as part of moving this mandate forward.

Really, we have an incredible system, whether it is something like the well-known Banff in Alberta, Jasper, or some of the lesser-known parks. As I was looking at our park system there are ones like Terra Nova in eastern Newfoundland. I am very pleased that there has been a decision to celebrate our 150th anniversary that Canadians will have free access to these parks across our country. I think that is a really good piece of the celebration and the celebratory ideas that have been put forward about what we will do. I encourage all Canadians to take advantage, and I might try to take an opportunity also to visit some of the national parks that I have not had the privilege of seeing.

Not only are our national parks very special to us, but a lot of them also have UNESCO designations. I think that really speaks to the treasure that we have in the 47 parks.

A component of this legislation deals with Wood Buffalo and I will talk about the near future, and then I think we need to go thousands of years back. Wood Buffalo National Park was created in 1922 and the purpose was to protect the declining bison. People were very concerned about the bison numbers, so it was created as a protection measure for the bison.

It is our biggest park. It is actually bigger than Switzerland. It is an enormous park. It is 44,000 square kilometres. It is really a big park that was created for the purpose of protection, but it is also representative of Canada's northern boreal plain.

I have not had the opportunity to go to this park, but I understand it is a place where we see the aurora borealis and a place where whooping crane research is happening. It is the nesting habitat of the last remaining of our migratory flocks, and of course the bison have made a comeback.

The park is located in northern Alberta and part of the Northwest Territories. I understand it is a true pleasure to visit, both in the summer and in the winter, but there is more to the Wood Buffalo story than something Canada did in 1922. There is evidence that indigenous people inhabited the region. There is evidence going back more than 8,000 years, so currently within that park there are

11 indigenous groups and eight reserves, and it is predominantly Cree, Chipewyan, and Métis. In the park there is some subsistence hunting, fishing, and trapping that still occurs.

This legislation would create the Garden River Reserve, so out of those 44,000 square kilometres as it currently is, there is a settlement. It is the Garden River Indian Reserve, and it is 37 square kilometres. This settlement was always a seasonal site, and when logging developed, it became an area that was occupied more or less permanently. It related really to the logging, but the Little Red River Cree were there, so the park was created.

•(1645)

There was a treaty signed, Treaty 8. This where we have to be very careful with the commitments the government makes, and then the subsequent creation of parks. Treaty 8 made some very significant commitments to the indigenous people of the area, in terms of their ability to hunt, to fish, and to use the land. Then all of sudden, in 1922, we created a park and really impeded the commitments that we made, through Treaty 8, back in 1899.

My previous colleague talked about Parks Canada and when Parks Canada has a mandate and how it impacts what was an existing right on that land, in a very negative way. I think he is raising some very good alarm bells because there have been real concerns. Since the park was created in 1922, there have been some violations in terms of that 1899 agreement.

We have to be careful; we have to look at pre-existing use. When we create parks, we have a mandate that is given to Parks Canada and that can sometimes create real challenges.

There have been negotiations going on for many decades. I know that when we were government, we were committed to trying to resolve this issue. The work that the Liberal government has continued to do is to try and resolve this issue with the Red River Cree. It is actually excising a piece of the land from within the southwest part of the park, near Peace River, which will be the Garden River settlement area. I would like to note this is not part of a land claim settlement; it is just really acknowledging some existing occupation that has been more or less permanent for a number of years. We support that component of the legislation. We think settling long-standing issues is important. That is important as we stand here today to debate the Rouge National Urban Park, but we also recognize that this agreement is creating a settlement of some long-standing issues in another important park in Canada.

I talked a bit about how this leads us to where we are now. The Rouge Park is the main focus of the legislation and, as we understand, the former minister of the environment spoke this morning about how reluctant the provincial Liberal government of the day had been in terms of working and wanting enormous amounts of money for the park and, also, how neglected the lands have actually been.

Government Orders

We have, I think, legitimate concerns, both from the former speaker and from our experience with the Wood Buffalo National Park. When we put language in that really impedes our ability to do the things that are right, in the future, farmers are concerned. Out of today's debate, I hope that the government is listening and will accept some modest amendments to this legislation that I think will do much better in the long term, in terms of what we are doing and where we are going.

• (1650)

Mr. Lloyd Longfield (Guelph, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I thank the hon. member for her speech on parks. I want to take this conversation to another feature that Parks Canada has; that is, national historic sites.

When I think of the park in Winnipeg, it is a similar concept of having an urban park managed by Parks Canada within a boundary of the downtown, which is a unique feature now in the city of Winnipeg, that brings people to a point where people have gathered for 6,000 years. First nations gathered at the forks of the Red and the Assiniboine rivers. Now there is a vibrant area there that has a baseball field, a market, and a hotel. It has many uses that might not have been part of the first concept of the park, but it has since developed into a very rich urban area for the city of Winnipeg.

Similarly, the park that we are talking about in Toronto could transform that part of Toronto into something that we could benefit from for generations to come.

Maybe the hon. member could comment on what a park is.

Mrs. Cathy McLeod: Madam Speaker, the member indicated a national historic site. Of course, national historic sites have completely different legislation that guides the direction that we have to take. What we are talking about is specific wording in a specific piece of legislation about the Rouge National Urban Park. I think there are some significant and important arguments in terms of what it is going to mean to the future, what it is going to mean to the existing farmers, and how it will allow that park to evolve.

We heard about the pine beetle. If the member goes to the Parks Canada site, he will see it talks about what ecological integrity means. It talks about restricting use. Most proudly, they talk about the 20 million people who can use the park. Well, ecological integrity talks about how sometimes to protect the park we need to restrict use.

Again, I think we are talking in a different context here.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Robert Aubin (Trois-Rivières, NDP): Madam Speaker, I have listened carefully to the speech by the hon. member, and obviously I share her pride in Parks Canada. We all have some small parts of it, whatever part of the country we are from.

I admit that what I found most interesting in her speech is what came at the very end. I wonder if she ran out of time when she told us that she hoped that the Liberal government would be open to accepting a few amendments to improve the bill.

I wonder if she could give us an idea of the amendments that she proposes to put forward.

[*English*]

Mrs. Cathy McLeod: Madam Speaker, as the member knows, amendments are done at committee. Unfortunately, I will not have the privilege of dealing with this at committee, but hearing the concerns that we are raising today, I have faith that my colleagues will have something that is appropriately presented that will help improve the bill.

I hope there is a willingness on all sides of the House to listen to any amendments that might come forward to deal with the issues that we have raised in the debate today.

Mr. Garnett Genuis (Sherwood Park—Fort Saskatchewan, CPC): Madam Speaker, we have heard some discussion in the House about what different stakeholders have been saying. It is worth underlining that there were representatives, two years ago when this was debated at the environment committee, who raised specific concerns about the use of the language “ecological integrity”. Local stakeholders were very concerned about people's ability to use the park and actually what is realistic.

I wonder if the member could comment more just on what the actual stakeholder response has been to some of this language.

Mrs. Cathy McLeod: Madam Speaker, we have heard that there are some who look at the definition and look at Parks Canada and how it is defining “ecological integrity”. It really is appropriately applicable to some of our more remote sites, but some might say that they are not sure that something like a Stanley Park model might work a little bit more effectively than something that really restricts us in terms of what we can do and where we can go.

Mr. Mel Arnold (North Okanagan—Shuswap, CPC): Madam Speaker, I would like to recognize the Minister of Environment for introducing this step in formalizing the establishment of the Rouge National Urban Park. I also recognize the work of our former Conservative government colleagues in navigating a path toward making this national park a reality.

In my background in conservation organizations, I have seen first hand the value of recognizing the value of conserving green spaces and the natural environment, and the value of the opportunity for all to experience them.

I used one word very selectively in the previous sentence, and that is the word “conserving”. I did not use the word “preserving”, which has a very different meaning. The two words sound similar but have a very different application when it comes to parks and green spaces. Conserving refers to allowing some use while retaining part of the resource in a sustainable manner, so that the resource can be there for the future. In creating conservation areas and parks, we often arrive at this type of conflict: how much we can preserve versus how much we have to conserve and how much we can use. This is often a real dilemma for policy-makers.

The challenge embodied in the wording of this bill is the inclusion of protecting ecological integrity, and the challenge it will create for policy-makers and park managers years down the road.

In my home province of British Columbia, we heard earlier today from a colleague about the impact on a massive scale of the over-application of ecological integrity in parks. When the pine beetle started to infest an area within Tweedsmuir Provincial Park, the park system was not allowed to use logging to remove the infected timber to reduce or contain the spread of the devastating beetle.

Looking back now, many see that this was an error. We have seen the loss of jobs. We have seen the loss of timber, and we are now struggling with how we keep sawmills and employment going in the province. It spread not just in the province of B.C., but now it is through Alberta and into Saskatchewan, all because we could not react within the park program.

Programs and policies without flexibility for accommodation of unforeseen scenarios prevented common sense from being applied. Now, decades later, we are still feeling the effects of those decisions. Diverse wildlife habitat has been lost to monoculture regrowth. In the end, large swaths of provinces have ended up being logged and the means of fighting the pine beetle has left huge areas of barren forest. This has resulted in no cover for ungulates and challenges to wildlife management that will span decades.

As we examine the Rouge National Urban Park and its location, on land subject to farming for over 200 years, industrial activity, and urban use, is it reasonable to expect ecological integrity to be achieved, whether it is included in the wording or not?

We have heard today of many issues that could make it impossible to achieve the full ecological integrity. If this is the case, one has to wonder what values might be traded off in attempts to achieve it. Would it be the existing agriculture? Would it be access in the dry summer months? Would it be disease spreading out of the park? What types of tradeoffs are we going to have to look at?

While fellow Canadians in the past have recognized the uniqueness of certain areas of this country, we are here today to continue to build on that legacy. Those early parks pioneers envisioned protecting areas for the benefit of future generations. I believe we are all here today working to continue that vision.

However, those early pioneers had no way of seeing how complicated parks management would become, no more than we can expect to see how complicated it will be in another 100 years.

• (1655)

In creating new parks, I believe we need to allow some flexibility to our future parks managers so that, as the demands on the parks change as years go by, those managers have the flexibility to adapt their management styles to meet the needs of the ecosystems and the park visitors. This brings me back to the words “conservation” and “preservation”, and I am hoping my colleagues and those listening today are getting a better understanding of the differences between these two words.

The inclusion of ecological integrity as the first priority would tie the hands of those future parks managers to focus on preservation, leaving them without the flexibility that they will need to evolve their management to create one of the goals of creating a park; that is, the conservation of existing systems and values for future generations. It is those future generations for whom I am concerned. As I noted earlier, my background is with conservation organiza-

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tions, where I have seen the value of getting youth into an outdoor environment. I say “an outdoor environment” instead of “a natural environment” for a reason. The reason is that our cultures have changed because many people have never experienced the true outdoors. To place them in a natural environment does not always render the best experience, much as our limited control measures in B.C. have not led to the best experience with the pine beetles.

By adapting the natural environment for a better interactive experience, the memories and values taken home and into the future increase in value. Over time, our society has become increasingly urbanized, especially in the area near Rouge National Urban Park. Providing for full ecological integrity in this park may not be in the best interests of the park, local residents, or visitors.

While I am fully in support of the formalization of Rouge National Urban Park, I am not supportive of including, in this case, the priority of ecological integrity. In defending this position, I would like to have had the opportunity to ask my friend and colleague from Red Deer—Lacombe to point out how many species he was authorized to manage within the scope of ecological integrity in the natural parks in which he worked. I am sure his answer would have been one, humans.

Humans are the only species that parks managers can manipulate within a natural park. We as humans have made such a change to our surroundings, especially near this proposed park, that we cannot expect to tie parks managers' hands to only managing humans and not other species within the parks. They are going to need the flexibility and the opportunity to use other systems to manage without being stuck to that ecological integrity phrase. I urge the members across the House to understand this as we move forward in this debate, and I hope that will be addressed in the committee stage of this bill. Again, in my experience, we have seen bad examples of tying the hands of parks managers.

A further example would be the Gros Morne National Park in Newfoundland, where the moose were simply eating the park habitat beyond recognition. Parks managers in Gros Morne National Park resisted for years allowing hunters into the park to manage the moose populations within the park. For years, hunters and people in the park saw what was happening, but because of park policy the managers would not allow the hunting to take place. Finally, within the past decade, they have seen the error of restricting that opportunity to manage. They have allowed hunting within that national park and the park is benefiting from it.

I hope that these examples can be taken forward and understood. As we move forward on this bill, I hope to see amendments to it.

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• (1700)

Mr. Gary Anandasangaree (Scarborough—Rouge Park, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I want to touch on the issue of ecological integrity. Every single park in Canada is enshrined with ecological integrity. It is the primary lens by which parks are managed. When we really set the footprint for urban parks in Canada, why should they not have the similar type of protection?

Based on my conversations with my constituents, as well as with many stakeholders who have worked on this issue for the last five decades, it is very clear to me that they are all looking for ecological integrity. I am confounded as to why the Conservative Party keeps bringing this up as an issue on which there should be some erosion.

• (1705)

Mr. Mel Arnold: Madam Speaker, I explained fairly well in my speech that it would simply tie the hands of managers and prevent them from managing or adjusting other species within the park, whether insect infestations, fire, or any other issue that may come up over the next 100 years, because that is what is looked at when creating a national park. Most national parks now were created some 100 years ago. We are going to be celebrating that next year. They did not have the social or biological issues that exist now. This is not a typical national park. This is what should be recognized. It is unique and cannot be managed under the same systems as all other national parks.

[*Translation*]

Mr. François Choquette (Drummond, NDP): Madam Speaker, I am pleased to rise again in the House to speak about the Rouge Park and the importance of environmental conservation in Canada.

My colleague may know that Canada is a signatory to the Convention on Biological Diversity. We must meet the Aichi targets, which involve conserving 17% of terrestrial lands and 10% of marine areas by 2020. We are not even close to reaching those targets. The Conservatives made some progress by creating a few parks.

Does my colleague believe, as I do, that the Liberal government must do much more than just improve the Rouge Park in order to achieve the objectives of the Green Budget Coalition, which is calling for the creation of six new parks? What does my colleague think of this?

[*English*]

Mr. Mel Arnold: Madam Speaker, the creation of protected areas is dear to my heart as well. We need natural spaces, but these do not necessarily have to be national parks. I do not think a lot of people understand what activities are restricted in national parks. There has been a significant controversy in the Okanagan area near my home, where there have been cattle grazing, hunting opportunities, berry picking, and so on for decades, centuries basically, but that is all threatened. All of those activities are threatened by the creation of a national park. There are other opportunities to protect that area for its natural attributes without doing it through a national park.

I agree that we need to create more conservation spaces, but I do not necessarily agree these all have to be done through national parks.

Ms. Rachael Harder (Lethbridge, CPC): Madam Speaker, when it comes to national parks, they are created for the benefit of people, the conservation of land, and the protection of animals. That said, when we create parks, we do so with the knowledge that they are for this generation and the next. How would the proposed change in terminology potentially impact the use of parks by future generations?

Mr. Mel Arnold: Madam Speaker, again, the hands of managers would be tied by this wording of ecological integrity. As I said earlier, previous parks were planned and established by people who wanted to protect areas that were of significant value and had specific interests. This park is in an urban area and has specific interests as well, but we need to allow managers to be flexible.

Mr. Harold Albrecht (Kitchener—Conestoga, CPC): Madam Speaker, before the last election, I had the privilege to serve on environment committee as chair. At that time, we heard from many witnesses throughout the course of several meetings on Bill C-40, an act respecting the Rouge National Park. When I found out that the Liberal government was returning to this legislation, I was surprised. Bill C-40 was great legislation. Our previous Conservative government did so much for Rouge National Park which was supported by experts and members of many different environmental organizations.

In the 2011 Speech from the Throne, our Conservative government committed \$143.7 million, over 10 years, to the creation of Rouge National Park. It appears to me that Bill C-18 is simply political cover by the federal Liberals for the Ontario Liberal government for not transferring the provincial portion of the lands before the 2015 election.

Bill C-18 does not include the transfer of parklands that were expropriated by the federal Liberals in the early 1970s for an airport, which has yet to be built, or the additional \$26.8 million over six years and \$3 million annually thereafter in funding that our Conservative government announced in 2015. The Liberals have not yet followed through with this commitment.

Provincial infrastructure Minister Chiarelli secretly demanded a \$100 million payment for the land transfer, which was rejected on principle by our government. Following this, provincial Minister Duguid wrote a letter as political cover stating that the Ontario government would not transfer lands until Rouge National Urban Park was amended to ensure that the first priority of park management was ecological integrity. Parks Canada disagreed with the ecological integrity designation as it was unrealistic for an urban park.

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The true environmentalist's definition of ecological integrity would include letting forests burn, letting floods run their course, and wildlife survival without human intervention. The Rouge sits alongside residential neighbourhoods, has highways, power lines, and a pipeline across various parts of it, with working farmland, a former landfill dump site, and an old auto wrecker yard within its borders. For these reasons, any attempt in Bill C-18 to define our actions as ecological integrity would be nice sounding words only.

Allow me to quote from one of the witnesses we heard from when we were studying Bill C-40 in the last Parliament. This quote is from Larry Noonan, chair of the Altona Forest Stewardship Committee. He 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...

Ecological integrity cannot be applied to an urban national park. We simply 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. 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.

Furthermore, setting ecological integrity as the first priority of park management would be an opening to the interference or even the removal of farmers from the park. The former environment minister, the Hon. Leona Aglukkaq, shared with our committee that "Applying in the legislation the concept of ecological integrity as we do in national parks would make it impossible to permit the type of sustainable farming that has been taking place in the Rouge for centuries."

Speaking more about farmers, Alan Latourelle, the former Parks Canada CEO for 13 years, also shared with our committee that "in the Rouge national urban park, a significant component is the land that we've agreed on and are working productively with the farmers. That, for example, would not be able to achieve the ecological integrity objective within that context".

• (1710)

It would be a shame if we, through Bill C-18, ended the rich history of sustainable farming in Rouge Park.

Another witness we heard from in our committee meeting was Mr. Jay Reesor, a farmer in the GTA who farms within the Rouge area. Let me quote part of his testimony:

The creation of the Rouge national urban park is something very important to me, as my wife and I have lived and worked in the federal portion of the land designated to become park since 1985. In fact, my Reesor family has lived and farmed in the current park area since 1804, when they emigrated from Pennsylvania in search of good farmland and good government and settled in the Rouge area.

He goes on to say:

Productive food-producing land is a valuable natural resource, just as a Carolinian forest or wetland is a valuable natural resource. The founders of the former Rouge Park had a vision for a property, a park, that protected nature and gave no real protection or encouragement to food-producing land, but they ran into obstacles. Unable to fulfill the dream for various reasons, they came to Parks Canada as the logical next step to help them implement their vision.

I am very pleased that our park system, in their draft management plan, has shown their intention and commitment to sustainable food production in this exciting new type of park. If the federal park system doesn't intentionally protect the natural resource of productive food-producing land, who will?

The agricultural community and our farmers are some of the best environmentalists. Let me quote a few more witnesses from our committee who spoke about farming and agriculture in the Rouge.

Mr. Alan Wells, chair of the Rouge Park Alliance said:

Parks Canada has continued to recognize agriculture as an important part of the park. The work has gained the confidence of the farming community both in the park and through regional farm organizations. Parks Canada has proposed plans that reflect the need to improve the trail system in the park. Draft trail plans included in the draft management plan build on the planning work recently done by the Rouge Park Alliance. The number of volunteer hike leaders has increased significantly over the last two years to 50 in total, and there is strong support for recreational users.

Over the last 20 years, cultural heritage through the preservation of historic buildings has been neglected due to a lack of funding and commitment. Parks Canada has the mandate, experience, and resources to address this issue and has included cultural heritage in Bill C-40.

Mr. Ian Buchanan, manager, Natural Heritage and Forestry, Environmental Promotion and Protection, Regional Municipality of York, stated:

It is encouraging that Bill C-40 presents clear direction in key areas, specifically clauses 4 and 6 dealing with the park's establishment and management; recognizes the unique setting; and reflects a multi-purpose focus, including natural and cultural heritage, farming, and an emphasis on healthy ecosystems, which we feel is the right balance. Parks Canada, municipalities, and partners have demonstrated a commitment to protecting and restoring the natural environment. York Region has recently invested \$6.5 million in the park, creating wetlands, grasslands, forests, and trails connecting people with nature.

From Mr. Larry Noonan, chair of the Altona Forest Stewardship Committee:

Some of these families have been there for over 150 years. Some arrived in Conestoga covered wagons. The purpose of these interviews is to preserve their stories as part of the cultural heritage and farming tradition of the Rouge watershed and the new national urban park. I am very happy to see that both the cultural heritage and the farming communities of the new park are encouraged and supported by Bill C-40.

Finally, from Mr. Ian Buchanan:

Through you, Mr. Chair, they are part of the solution. If we don't acknowledge that the farming community is the front line of environmental protection, we're missing the point. We've worked with farmers for many years, as well as many of the conservation organizations like Ontario Nature, Ducks Unlimited, and had some very significant wins, as York Region has had, through our greening strategy. Thanks for mentioning that. We've had some great successes there. We both learn and the environment wins. That is going to be an integral part of Rouge Park moving forward.

• (1715)

I want to highlight that first part of the quote: "If we don't acknowledge that the farming community is the front line of environmental protection, we're missing the point".

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As I said at the beginning of my speech, farmers are some of our best environmentalists. As I drive through my riding, I can attest to this fact as I look at the cover crops that have been planted where normally at this time of year we would simply have bare land with some stubble. Today when we drive through the area, we see green cover crops. These cover crops are essential to reduce erosion, help with carbon sequestration, and water retention in the soil, which leads to better soil quality by improving and increasing organic matter in the soil.

In addition to cover crops, we see that many of the farmers in my area are no longer doing deep tillage. They are not plowing, disking, cultivating, and harrowing. Rather, they are going to a no-till application, which simply inserts the seed into the ground. The ground maintains better soil integrity, better water retention, and improved soil quality. In addition to that, because the farmers are not now passing over the land multiple times with their tractors, they are reducing their fuel consumption. This increases our ability to reduce our greenhouse gas emissions and also reduce fuel costs.

Along the streams and rivers in my riding, in almost every one, members will see a buffer zone where previously cattle or other wildlife and livestock might have had access to the streams and rivers. These buffer zones now create an area where, first of all, water runoff is filtered by the grass next to the stream. Trees are growing in the buffered area, and so the streams are being protected by the trees. The shade of those trees reduces the temperature of the water. We are seeing fish come back into these streams and an improved water quality, which not only benefits the stream and river right there but, as those of us in the Great Lakes area know, makes a great contribution to preserving our environment and improving the water quality in our Great Lakes.

I could also speak about wetland conservation, and we see that wetlands are great filters for water. They act as sponges during flood time, as they absorb that water. Carbon sequestration is a big part of not only preserving the wetlands but in many cases restoring wetlands that had previously been drained and were in crop production. They are now being returned to wetland production.

In addition to driving through my riding and seeing these great examples of good environmentalism on the part of our farmers, just recently, in October, I hosted a round table in my riding with farmers and agroforestry people to get an idea of the kinds of initiatives the farmers are taking to improve our environment. This speaks to the fact that, in addition to the work that we are doing in the Rouge Park, we know that our farmers will be co-labourers in our work of protecting our environment. If I have time at the end of my comments, I would like to read a few comments from that round table.

I would like to inform Canadians as to what Bill C-40, the previous rendition of the Rouge Park act, actually included. I think when we listen to some of the things that were included in Bill C-40, Rouge National Urban Park Act, Canadians will understand the great work that was done in producing this act, which will protect the Rouge National Urban Park.

Whereas the Rouge Valley contains some of the last remnants of the Carolinian forest in Canada, significant geological features and a combination of diverse habitats linking Lake Ontario to the Oak Ridges Moraine;

Whereas the foresight, dedication and engagement of community visionaries and various levels of government have laid the foundation for the creation of a park in the Rouge Valley, an area that is rich in natural and cultural resources and is readily accessible to the population of Canada's largest metropolitan area;

I will stop for a moment on that area, just to point out that right at the doorstep of the GTA is an urban national park. Children who would not ordinarily have the option of perhaps visiting one of our national parks that are further afield will have the option to see, learn, touch, and feel these things that are in the national park, which would not ordinarily be accessible to them.

• (1720)

It goes on:

Whereas there is a unique opportunity to connect Canadians with the natural and cultural heritage of the Rouge Valley and with history of its early Aboriginal inhabitants and others who shaped its landscape; and whereas Parliament wishes to protect natural ecosystems and maintain natural wildlife in the Rouge Valley, to provide meaningful opportunities for Canadians to experience and enjoy the diverse landscapes of the Rouge Valley, to engage local communities and businesses, Aboriginal organizations and youth as well as other Canadians, to become stewards and ambassadors of the park.

We cannot overstate that part, seeing the co-operation that we have been able to achieve with the aboriginal organizations, youth, the local communities, and businesses to become stewards and ambassadors of the park, not just using the park but actually being able to promote the use of this park and its preservation. It goes on:

...to provide a wide range of recreational, interpretive, volunteer and learning activities to attract a diverse urban population to the park, to enable youth and other visitors to connect with nature in an urban setting, to protect the natural and cultural landscapes of the park and identify its heritage values to facilitate an understanding and appreciation of the history of the region, to encourage sustainable farming practices, to support the preservation of agricultural lands in the park and celebrate the agricultural heritage of the region, and to promote the park as a place of discovery, enjoyment and learning, and as a gateway to all of Canada's national protected heritage areas.

It continues in section 4 on the establishment of the park:

Rouge National Urban Park, which is described in the schedule, has established for the purposes of protecting and presenting for current and future generations, the natural and cultural heritage of the park and its diverse landscapes, promoting a vibrant farming community and encouraging Canadians to discover and connect with their national protected heritage areas.

I think members will see so many of the examples that I have read from many of the witnesses who appeared before our committee. I could go on and read from my report on the round table that we conducted, but I do not think my time will allow me to do that. I just wanted to point out the above from Bill C-40, the bill our Conservative government enacted.

I had the privilege of sitting on the environment committee as chair, listening to these witnesses, seeing the hard work that was done, including by the former Parks Canada CEO, Alan Latourelle, and his clear recommendation not to include ecological integrity within the bill.

These are solid principles on which the Rouge Park was established. The current protections provided to Rouge National Urban Park far exceed the protections provided by the Province of Ontario, specifically in prohibiting mining, logging, hunting, and in application of the Species at Risk Act and year-round dedicated enforcement officers.

The Liberals are continuing to play games with the park, which is why Bill C-18 is nothing more than an assortment of unrelated items with the intention of appeasing Kathleen Wynne and the Ontario Liberals in providing political cover for their pre-election political attack that has used Rouge National Urban Park as a political bargaining chip.

Ecological integrity as a primary guiding principle for the park is an unrealistic measure for an urban park, which was established to introduce Canadians to nature, local culture, and agriculture, a first of its kind in Canada.

In closing, the Conservative Party stands proud about the creation of Rouge National Park, described best by Alan Latourelle as:

Presenting a unique opportunity to connect residents of the GTA to nature, while demonstrating global conservation leadership under the International Union for the Conservation of Nature's Urban Protected Areas program, and showing respect to first nations and farmers who have cared for this land for countless generations, connecting resident of the GTA to the future.

It is a beautiful, breathtaking park, a sight to behold, and I hope all members will have the opportunity to visit it.

While we will be supporting this legislation going to committee, we hope the Liberal government will listen to stakeholders such as Wayne Emmerson, chairman and CEO of York region; Glen De Baeremaeker, deputy mayor, City of Toronto, and the mayors from Markham, Richmond Hill and Pickering; the York Region Federation of Agriculture; and individual farmers like Jay Reesor; and the Toronto Zoo and others.

As the committee looks at the bill, I am hoping it will amend Bill C-18 by removing the ecological integrity portion of this legislation.

• (1725)

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member for Kitchener—Conestoga will have 10 minutes for a question and comment period when the House next returns to debate on the question before the House.

[Translation]

It being 5:30 p.m., the House will now proceed to the consideration of private members' business as listed on today's Order Paper.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

• (1730)

[Translation]

INCOME TAX ACT

Mr. Guy Caron (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques, NDP) moved that Bill C-274, an Act to amend the Income Tax Act (transfer of small business or family farm or fishing corporation), be read the second time and referred to a committee.

He said: Mr. Speaker, I have to admit that I am very pleased to debate this bill. It is the first time that I have had the opportunity to introduce and debate a private member's bill in the House as I was unable to do so in the last Parliament.

Private Members' Business

Bill C-274 would correct and eliminate a gross injustice concerning the transfer of our farms and SMEs. This issue is more important than ever. Demographically speaking, 76% of small business owners plan to transfer ownership of their companies so that they can retire within the next 10 years, and 50% of farm owners want to do the same thing, also within the next 10 years.

The injustice that this bill is intended to remedy is that, if someone has a small business, a farm, or even a fishing boat and wants to sell it to his or her children, in a corporate structure, the seller, who is the owner of the small business or family farm in question, will pay much more income tax than if he or she decided to sell to a stranger.

In a very large number of cases, that means choosing between having a larger pension fund by selling to a stranger—since a pension fund is what business owners get when they sell their business—and having a smaller pension fund by selling to one's children. The difference can be extremely large. If we ignore the tax planning that such a transaction can entail, for the sale of a farm worth \$10 million, which, with all the assets, is quite often a reasonable price, selling to a child can cost up to \$1.2 million more in income tax than if the farm is sold to a stranger. In the case of the sale of a business worth \$1 million, the difference can be more than \$300,000 in income tax.

The reason is very simple: if people want to sell to their children, to someone related to them, the difference between the sale price and the original price at the time of purchase is considered a dividend under the Income Tax Act. Consequently, it is treated like a dividend for tax purposes. Across the country, dividends are taxed at about 35% on average.

If business owners sell to someone who is not a family member, in other words, an unrelated person, a stranger, the difference between the sale price and the original price at the time of purchase is considered a capital gain. In that case, there is a lifetime exemption of about \$825,000 for a business and about \$1 million for a farm or a fishing boat. The remaining capital gain is taxed at about 25% on average. This explains the difference between selling to a stranger and selling to a child.

Obviously, it is unfair. In every constituency, we have business owners. People who want to sell their small business, their family farm, or their fishing boat in the Atlantic provinces, for example, are faced with an extremely heart-rending choice. Will they agree to sell their business to a family member and have \$100,000, \$125,000, or \$150,000 less in their pension fund because they want their child to succeed them, because they want someone in the family to take over a business that they built with their own hands? They may not have the opportunity to do so if their pension fund is not large enough. Unfortunately, instead of selling to their child, who would be willing to take over, they have to consider selling to a stranger.

My bill seeks to correct this injustice. I admit that the bill is somewhat self-serving because this has been an ongoing problem in my constituency. In fact, the bill was prepared in co-operation with the farmers and SMEs in my riding. Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques is in the Lower St. Lawrence region, and 12% of the region's economy is dependent on agriculture.

Private Members' Business

We have many family farms, especially dairy farms, as well as some maple sugar operations. In my constituency, it is not big companies that drive the economy. It is small businesses.

People, particularly those in the farming community, have been telling me about this situation since I first took office in 2011. They are being forced to choose between selling to a child at a tax loss and selling to a stranger.

The situation has become even more worrisome since there has been talk of land speculation. Certain people want to buy farmland to speculate on its value.

• (1735)

Such people have an advantage right from the start, since their offer means that the person selling the company or farm will have a lot less income tax to pay. The current situation is unfair.

My bill is designed to resolve the situation so that the sale of a family business or farm to a child will be treated as a capital gain, the same as if it were sold to a stranger.

There is no real reason to oppose such a measure. There are three reasons why such a measure may have been opposed in the past. First, this type of measure could open the door to aggressive tax avoidance, which is why things are the way they are now. However, my bill eliminates that possibility by requiring the buyer to retain his shares for a minimum of five years, except in case of death. People who retain their shares for five years do so because the family transfer was genuine and not because they were trying to work the system to avoid paying income tax.

The second reason why such a measure may have been opposed in the past is the argument that only the richest farmers or entrepreneurs would benefit from the measure. Once again, that is not the case with my bill because it deals only with transactions of \$15 million or less. All transactions over \$15 million, like those involving big farms or companies, are excluded from the terms of Bill C-274.

The third reason why such a measure could have been opposed, the last one I can think of, is the cost of the bill. Obviously, there will be a cost in lost revenue for the government. However, that cost is estimated not in the hundreds of millions of dollars, but between \$75 million and \$90 million. I know that different figures are being advanced, particularly by the finance department, but mine have been corroborated by many tax experts. The reason why we are talking about \$75 million to \$90 million is that, at present, all of this potential income tax paid by people who are selling small businesses or family farms is reduced through tax planning.

I can back up these figures with the following facts. Quebec, which has its own income taxation system, identified the same problem. It corrected it in its 2015 budget, and the correction has been implemented since March 2016. Its approach to fixing this problem is somewhat different than mine, but ultimately, Quebec estimates that eliminating this injustice will cost it some \$15 million in lost revenue.

If Quebec loses \$15 million, I think it is quite plausible that the lost revenue at the federal level would be around \$75 million to \$90 million.

This flagrant injustice has to be corrected. Speaking of injustice, imagine for a moment if the situation were reversed. Imagine if, currently, the rules for selling to a stranger and selling to one's child were the same, and then imagine if a member tabled a bill seeking to make selling to a stranger more appealing, would the House find that acceptable? Would it pass such a bill? Of course not; the question answers itself.

I would like to point out that I am not the only person in the House to note the problem. From what I understand, I should have the support of a great many, if not all, of the opposition members. I am eager to hear the speeches.

Let us not forget that, in June 2015, before the last election, the Liberal member for Bourassa tabled Bill C-691, which sought to correct this injustice regarding SMEs. My bill, at least so far as the SME component is concerned, was modelled on his bill as well as on that of my colleague from Berthier—Maskinongé, who drafted a number of clauses for farms and for fishing companies. My colleague from Joliette at the time also drafted a section on transactions between siblings.

My Liberal colleague at the time acknowledged the problem, and so did the government of Quebec, which then corrected it. I expect the hon. members to consider all of the small businesses and family farms in their ridings. I would also like members representing coastal constituencies to consider the impact this might have on fishing companies.

• (1740)

We are talking about small businesses and people who have worked all their lives to try and earn a living, people who, often, found themselves having to get their family business up and running again, as well as those who created it from scratch and now want it to stay in the family.

What this government has always been telling these Canadians is that they have to suffer this injustice when they sell their business to their children. In my opinion, that is totally unfair. Allow me to explain.

My colleague from Pierre-Boucher—Les Patriotes—Verchères had tried to table a bill in the wake of a situation that occurred in his riding and that made the headlines in May. Christian Tremblay, of Armoires Tremblay, in Saint-Mathieu-de-Beloeil, wanted to sell his company to his son Patrick, a company worth \$1.7 million.

Imagine his surprise when he found out that, if he sold it to his son rather than to a stranger, he would have to pay \$100,000 more in income tax. He considers the situation quite unfair. Will he sell to his son and make \$100,000 less on a \$1.7-million sale, or will he sell to a stranger so that he can keep that money in his account? The issue is receiving media attention, and thousands of new cases are bound to come up, at a growing rate, because of the demographic shift we will be going through over the next 10 years.

I would also like to talk about a problem that my bill will remedy, particularly in the regions. I would say that my bill may have greater importance in regions such as mine than it might have in major urban centres, because we are facing an exodus of young people.

In my constituency, young people are leaving the region for lack of employment opportunities; they go to school in urban centres, never to return again.

My bill will not fully remedy this situation. However, it will give our young people one more reason to stay in the region by giving them a better chance of acquiring the family business. It is something I hear about all the time in Rimouski-Neigette, Témiscouata and Les Basques, and I know that MPs from the regions have observed and heard the same thing.

I have covered a lot of kilometres in Canada promoting my bill. For two weeks last summer, I toured the Atlantic provinces talking to chambers of commerce, farming organizations and fishing organizations, to tell them about my bill, obviously, and find out if they would like to support it. In large part, they said yes.

I did the same thing in some parts of Quebec and Saskatchewan not long ago, and I will continue doing so until we vote on the bill at second reading. I think it is working, because I have enjoyed extraordinary support.

I organized a news conference when I introduced my bill last May. At my side was Dan Kelly, president of the Canadian Federation of Independent Business, who supports this bill.

I also have the support of the major chambers of commerce, including the Fédération des chambres de commerce du Québec, the metropolitan Montreal chamber of commerce, and different regional chambers in my riding and my region, as well as all over Quebec. Furthermore I have the support of the Canadian Federation of Agriculture, the Union des producteurs agricoles, the UPA, and other agricultural organizations all over the country. Finally, I have the support of fishers' organizations, including the Nova Scotia Fish Packers Association, and I will have others as well. I will not abandon this fight.

I hope to have the support of the members of the House, who will see that this is not a partisan issue, but one that affects each of their ridings all over the country. In my view, it is a victory for common sense to vote in favour of this bill and so bring about tax fairness.

My bill rules out any possibility of fiscal abuse. It rules out the possibility that it will be disproportionately costly for the government, and it ensures that the richest owners or farmers are not going to be the ones to benefit.

Hence there is no reason to vote against this bill. I am eager to hear my colleagues on debate, and I hope to have their support so that this bill can be referred to the Standing Committee on Finance for second reading.

• (1745)

Mr. François-Philippe Champagne (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, first of all I thank my hon. colleague for his initiative. I have huge respect for him. He knows that, because he sits with us on the Standing Committee on Finance, and he always makes interesting arguments in the House.

However, I have to disagree with him on this occasion, because the greatest injustice that could be done today would be to promote tax avoidance in any way.

Private Members' Business

Given the figures he has just put forward, I would like my colleague on the other side of the House to explain how he arrived at an amount of \$10 million or \$15 million, when Finance Canada has estimated the opportunities for tax evasion in the first and subsequent years at over \$800 million.

Mr. Guy Caron: Mr. Speaker, I too have great respect for my hon. colleague.

I am not talking about \$10 million to \$15 million, but rather about \$75 million to \$90 million. It is Quebec that will have to pay \$15 million because of the changes it has made.

My bill eliminates the possibility of tax avoidance thanks to two measures. The first requires the buyer to retain the shares for five years. The Canada Revenue Agency was afraid that, without such a clause, shares would pass from one family member to another. This clause of my bill will make that impossible.

The second clause requires the seller and the buyer to provide an affidavit approved by the Canada Revenue Agency, to ensure that this is in fact a family transfer.

With regard to the estimate from the finance department, honestly, I have never heard of an estimate so high. It makes absolutely no sense. My estimate comes from various tax experts including, for one, Éric Dufour from Grant Thornton.

I recommend that my colleague go and speak to him, since he does not live too far away. He is a great specialist on the family transfer of businesses in Quebec. He estimates that total lost revenue will be between \$75 million and \$90 million. There will be no tax avoidance.

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus (Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I support my colleague's bill.

As I am myself a small business owner who has also gone through a family transfer, I know that it is a very complex matter. It makes no sense to favour a stranger ahead of one's own family.

As a small business owner, I would like to know what will happen at the time of my death. I have had to take out insurance to pay the taxes that will be applied to my estate. Since my children will have to pay a huge amount of income tax when they inherit the business, I am obliged to take out insurance.

Will this bill cover this aspect as well?

Mr. Guy Caron: Mr. Speaker, I am pleased that my colleague recognizes the complexity, because the tax law is complex indeed.

Being an economist and not a tax expert, I do not have a specific answer to this question. I do not believe that will be the case, but all the same I have included in my bill a clause to exempt the estate from this rule in the event of death of a buyer who still holds his shares so as to not allow for tax avoidance. If he sells his shares before five years are up, he will be obliged to retroactively pay the income tax that should have been paid. If he dies, however, the estate will not have to do this, for reasons that are very obvious.

With this clause I have attempted to reassure people who might want to make a family transfer by telling them that they would not get hit, by pure accident, with a tax bill that is too high because of an early death.

Private Members' Business

Mr. François Choquette (Drummond, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank and congratulate my hon. colleague from Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques for his excellent work.

He has done a tour through my constituency of Drummond. He met there with representatives of the chamber of commerce and numerous farmers concerned by this issue. There is indeed a problem of unfairness. It does not make sense to get more money by selling one's business to a stranger than by selling to a family member.

Could my colleague talk about this injustice and explain how this bill will correct it?

• (1750)

Mr. Guy Caron: Mr. Speaker, of course it remedies this injustice. Indeed, it is for that reason that I wonder why the Parliamentary Secretary opposes it.

I have no idea where he got \$800 million. It exceeds all the estimates made by various tax experts. In fact, the experts themselves feel that the figures they heard before, \$200 million or \$250 million, have been greatly exaggerated. Now, we are hearing one that is four times higher.

Instead of relying solely on figures from the Department of Finance, the Parliamentary Secretary should speak to the experts at Mallette and Raymond Chabot Grant Thornton, and to tax experts in the rest of the country, because they are not hearing the same thing. They have been studying the issue and sounding the alarm for a long time.

Eventually, the House will have to make an extremely important decision. Are we going to rely on what our own farmers and businesspeople are telling us or on hypothetical scenarios that are presented by the government and whose source is unknown?

Mr. François-Philippe Champagne (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, before I begin, I would like to thank my colleague once again for raising this important issue.

I can assure him that we are listening to Canadians. I meet with people every day. I have met with accounting firms and tax firms. We understand this issue, but the most important thing we have to do, as a government, is to understand that the greatest injustice we could do would be to introduce new tax loopholes in Canada. The \$800 million figure is the figure provided by the Department of Finance, which has studied this issue at least as thoroughly as my colleague on the other side of the House. The \$800 million figure is just the beginning; we expect it to be higher in subsequent years.

I am rising in the House to speak to my colleague's bill, Bill C-274. The stated objective of this bill, to facilitate the transfer of family businesses to future generations in a family, seems commendable. It is the statement of principle by my colleague across the aisle. His proposed approach is to amend two long-standing anti-avoidance rules in the Income Tax Act. Those two measures have been in the Canadian tax code for a long time.

I am so pleased to be here this evening to discuss the repercussions that these fiscal changes may have. We often talk about unexpected consequences. My colleague's principle is worthy, but we have to take a close look at the measures themselves and

really understand the fiscal consequences this could have for the country. I am sure all members of the House will agree that the intention behind this bill is good, and I want to go on the record as saying that my colleague's intention is very good. There is no doubt about that. Many of us are from rural parts of Quebec and Canada. We understand how things are for our farmers and entrepreneurs. I represent Shawinigan, which is, in a way, the beating heart of entrepreneurship in Quebec. We know all about entrepreneurship. We all come from places where small businesses can prosper, and we all want a fair tax system for all Canadians.

However, when weighing the merits of this bill, it is important to consider all the potential consequences of passing it. We must not lose sight of the fact that the tax rules that Bill C-274 proposes to amend exist for a reason, and that is to prevent people from engaging in inappropriate tax avoidance in Canada. Let us be clear about what Bill C-274 is proposing, and that is to soften the rules designed to prevent tax avoidance in Canada.

Let me explain. The proposed changes would dilute the anti-avoidance rules in sections 55 and 84.1 of the Income Tax Act. To help my colleagues fully understand what that means, let us first look at section 55 of the Income Tax Act. As currently worded, section 55 of the act applies to corporations that seek to inappropriately reduce capital gains by paying tax-free dividends between corporations. In short, the anti-avoidance rules consider such dividends to be a capital gain.

Two exemptions to the anti-avoidance rule authorize business restructuring by allowing company shareholders to split company shares between them, while deferring taxes. When those exemptions apply, any dividend paid between companies in the context of restructuring is not considered a capital gain.

The first exemption applies to the restructuring of related corporations, and the second applies to all corporate restructurings. Bill C-274 would broaden that first exemption, which we can call the related corporations exemption, so that it applies to brothers and sisters.

Spouses, as well as parents and their children, are eligible for this exemption because it is presumed that they have shared economic interests. However, brothers and sisters are considered to have separate and independent economic interests and are therefore not eligible for the related corporations exemption. That is consistent with other tax rules. For example, a family farm or fishing corporation cannot be transferred among brothers and sisters on a tax-deferred basis.

That being said, although brothers and sisters cannot restructure their participation in a corporation on a tax-deferred basis under the related corporations exemption, they can do it under the second exemption I mentioned earlier, which applies to all corporate restructuring. It is called the "butterfly exemption".

●(1755)

Now the question is why siblings and their companies would want to have access to the first exemption if they can already achieve the same thing through the second exemption. The answer is that the conditions are less rigorous under the first exemption. The conditions are less rigorous because the companies are linked and are considered part of the same economic group at the time of restructuring. As a result, assets can be transferred on a tax-deferred basis within a group of related companies regardless of the composition of assets.

Under the second exemption, known as the “butterfly exemption”, one condition requires a proportional distribution of the various types of assets transferred. The goal of this condition is to prevent tax avoidance.

By way of illustration, I would return to the example my colleague used of three siblings who each own one-third of a family farm corporation. Those siblings could reorganize the company's assets by transferring, on a tax-deferred basis, those assets to their individual farm corporations by transferring their proportionate share of each type of asset from the family farm corporation.

There are fewer tax avoidance opportunities under the butterfly exemption because of the requirement that each of the brothers' and sisters' corporations must receive its proportional share of the assets of the corporation being restructured. If the proposed amendment to section 55 were passed, as my colleague suggests, the siblings could undertake a business restructuring in which the dividends paid between their corporations would not be treated as capital gains. The consequence of that would be to create new opportunities for tax avoidance in Canada.

I would also like to point out that Bill C-15, which received royal assent in June 2016, included an amendment that tightened the anti-avoidance rule set out in section 55, a rule that Bill C-274 would loosen. Consequently, if Bill C-274 were passed into law, we would be sending a message that conflicts with what Parliament recently decided concerning this particular provision.

I would now like to say a few words about the other anti-avoidance rule that Bill C-274 would loosen, the rule set out in section 84.1 of the Income Tax Act. This anti-avoidance rule may apply when an individual sells shares of one corporation to another corporation that is related to the individual.

For example, an individual might sell shares to a corporation owned by his child or grandchild. In such a case, the proceeds of the sale received by the seller may be considered, in certain circumstances, to be a taxable dividend instead of a capital gain, which is taxed at a lower rate or even exempt from tax if the lifetime capital gains exemption is available to the individual.

Bill C-274 would limit the application of the anti-avoidance rule by excluding the sale of shares of a corporation owned by an individual to corporations controlled by his children and grandchildren. However, that would facilitate the conversion of dividends into capital gains that are taxed at a lower rate or tax exempt. Such conversions of corporate dividends into capital gains taxed at a lower rate could be made as often as the managing owner wants to extract the corporation's surpluses with tax deferral.

Private Members' Business

Significant tax planning would occur if Bill C-274 were passed. For example, a high-income shareholder could reduce his income tax by \$17,500 for each \$100,000 in business profits.

Another important point to consider is the fact that nothing is stopping a parent from selling shares of his family corporation directly to his child or grandchild and claiming the lifetime capital gains exemption on the capital gains arising from the transaction.

In closing, I think that the most important thing to say today is that nothing in Canada's Income Tax Act prevents corporate transfers. My colleague's proposal would create opportunities for tax avoidance.

●(1800)

The government listened to Canadians, and then it pledged to do everything in its power to make tax fairness a reality in Canada.

Mr. Luc Berthold (Mégantic—L'Érable, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am not an economist, a tax expert, or a member of the Standing Committee on Finance. I am, however, a regionalist, and I have to say that this bill was good news for people in the regions and those in my riding who want to benefit from everything they have created over the years and see it last. That is the focus of my remarks this evening.

People who have spent 40 years building a business by the sweat of their brow want someone to pass the torch to when they take their well-deserved retirement. Everyone knows that farming is very hard work. Having a family member take over the business is tremendously satisfying because that makes it highly likely that the business will retain the same values and philosophy. Plus, the young people who take over can inject fresh ideas.

At this time, someone who owns a small business, a family farm or family fishing business, who wants to retire and hand over his or her business to a sibling or family member must pay more tax than if he or she sells it to someone with no family ties. I want to repeat this. Right now, someone who wants to retire and hand over his or her business to a sibling pays more tax than if he or she sells it to a buyer with no family ties whatsoever.

Despite the finance minister's fine speeches, when you live in the regions, this matters. These rules have been identified as one of the big problems associated with family succession in these kinds of businesses. Business owners might be less inclined to sell their business to family members, understandably, and this makes them more likely to sell to strangers.

The bill before us is meant to solve part of the problem. We need to make sure that businesses are sold to local people because that is what ensures the development of our local communities. Although this bill meets most of those objectives, there are a few points that I have to wonder about. I will address those throughout my intervention.

Private Members' Business

Let us talk about the problems that the next generation of farmers is facing. The statistics on the transfer of farms are worrisome and significant. Half of all farm transfers fail. The failure rate is so high because young people who want to take over a family farm sadly face many obstacles.

In Quebec, for example, the farming population is aging quickly. An estimated 40% of farmers will have left farming between 2014 and 2024. If the number of farms decreases, the number of transferors increases, and the farms continue to grow, then the viability of business transfers decreases and young people will have less access to farm capital.

The president of the Canadian Federation of Agriculture says he believes that everyone realizes that a large number of farm assets are going to be transferred over the next 15 to 20 years and that we must do everything we can to recognize that farms today are different than they were 30 years ago. He also believes that we must reduce tax liabilities so that the money is used to ensure that the farms that are transferred remain as viable as possible.

A farmer in my riding, Michel Couture from Ferme Coupard in Thetford Mines, said last week in the *Courrier Frontenac* newspaper that many farmers are the last generation that are going to operate the farm and that, considering the current situation in farming, many will abandon production. He added that Quebec is losing at least 2% of its farmers every year.

Farms cost a lot of money, buying one is extremely expensive. Thus, young farmers seeking to acquire a farm have to take on a partner. Let us imagine a young farmer who is an only child and who would like to buy the family farm upon his parents' retirement. What can he do but find a partner? Who will he go into business with if he does not want to pay more taxes?

The size of farms and the family model have changed a lot. It is no longer the 1980s or the 1990s. Today, family farms are full-fledged businesses. It is not unusual for two, three or even four people to be in charge. For example, the owner of Ferme Coupard, which I spoke about earlier, has made many investments over the past few years. Three or four people work on the farm. In 2014, the owner modernized the operation and streamlined his work methods, which were about 50 years old.

• (1805)

How much did it cost him? It cost \$1.4 million. On the national scale, it is a small regional business. However, for a small farm in Thetford Mines, \$1.4 million is a major investment, especially when one has to pay out of pocket. Then there are the concerns about the agricultural sector.

I would like to remind members that the issue of diafiltered milk has not yet been resolved. We do not really know kind of compensation will be offered for the European trade deal. We had come up with a good plan. Unfortunately, this plan will now help farms modernize their equipment and maybe give them \$5,000 a year even though the real cost of modernization is \$1.4 million. We are not going to help dairy producers with just \$5,000. But that is another issue. Sometimes we take the opportunities that present themselves to send a message. That is what I just did.

The family model has changed. There are not many traditional families left consisting of a father, a mother, and their children. Times have changed and there are not many families with 14 or 15 people. We have to adapt.

Bearing all of that in mind, I think that the bill needs clarification, especially on the definition of family members. Ron Bonnett, president of the Canadian Federation of Agriculture, said that the law should be amended to broaden the definition of family members to reflect very large farming operations that involve more family members.

Is that useful? I do not know. I said at the beginning that I am neither a tax expert nor an economist, but a regionalist. If these changes can help the farms in our regions, why not consider them?

What is a family member? One's child? The child of one's spouse? A spouse? A brother, sister, niece or nephew? We need to dig into these questions because the definition of the family is changing. Our tax rules have to keep pace.

This is an issue that affects businesses in other sectors too. Earlier, one of my colleagues, a business owner himself, talked about problems with transferring businesses. The Association des marchands dépanneurs et épiciers du Québec has also expressed frustration with the situation, particularly because it can be hard to find new owners, it says. The association's director, Yves Servais, said:

We have many business owners who have reached an age where they would like to pass down their business to their children, who are interested in taking over. They should not be fiscally disadvantaged. I find the current rules unfair. They do not in any way encourage people to hold on to their family business.

Dan Kelly from the Canadian Federation of Independent Business says that many small business members report that current tax rules often discourage them from passing on their firm to their children and encourage selling to a stranger.

It is important to make it easier to transfer businesses to the next generation in our regions. In our regions, a farm is a small business that ensures the survival of villages, the corner store, the tractor dealer, the grocery store, and the restaurant. That is how important farming and farmers truly are.

If we allow young people to leave by not helping them take over the family business, it will all disappear. We need to look at the bigger picture. It is not just the farm that disappears, but the entire village and community. If all the small villages in Thetford Mines or Plessisville disappear, then the main town will suffer.

The principle of the bill speaks to us because we believe that the government must not increase the tax burden on families and business owners. On the contrary, it must put in place measures to encourage entrepreneurship. We also believe in entrepreneurship. The economic development of the regions is important to us.

I have a few questions left for the hon. member about the notion of family member. However, I am sure that he will be prepared to answer those questions if the House allows the bill to get to committee stage.

Private Members' Business

•(1810)

So many questions that we would be pleased to ask our colleague, questions that we will ask in the interest of our small businesses, family farms, and fishing corporations.

Ms. Ruth Ellen Brosseau (Berthier—Maskinongé, NDP): Mr. Speaker, today, I have the great pleasure of taking part in the debate on the bill introduced by my colleague from Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques. First of all, I want to thank my colleague for his work on this bill, his commitment, his consultations, and for listening. This is truly a bill that will improve Canadians' quality of life.

I have to admit that I was truly disappointed with the speech by my colleague from Saint-Maurice—Champlain. I represent the riding of Berthier—Maskinongé and part of the regional municipality of Maskinongé is located in Mauricie.

My colleague from Shawinigan represents a very rural area that has hundreds of SMEs, and I know that this bill will improve the economic situation of the regions. It is really frustrating when members pull figures out of thin air, maybe out of their own pockets. I believe that everyone agrees with the principle of this bill. I hope that it will be referred to committee so we can better understand where these figures come from.

I would like to point out that this bill has widespread support from all across the country. I believe it is also important to talk about this bill in my role as agriculture and agri-food critic. I am a member of the standing committee, and we are currently studying the next policy framework. Earlier today, in fact, officials were explaining to us once again how hard it is to find people to take over. It is not easy. The price of land is going up, and access to capital is difficult, so a bill like this one is a step in the right direction.

I should explain a little about the situation facing family farms in Canada. Over the past 10 years, we have lost 8,000 family farms. It is clear that this phenomenon is far from over, and it is important that we tackle the problem head on. There are a number of things we could do, and one of them is to make it easier to transfer farms between family members.

We also know that we have an aging population, especially in the regions. The demand for people to take over these businesses is only going to increase over the next few years. Overall, we are talking about \$50 billion in farm assets that will be transferred between 2016 and 2026. Therefore, this bill is very important to the farming community.

At present, farmers look at their farms as their pension fund, and as much as they would love to transfer them to a family member, it is much more advantageous to sell to a stranger than someone who is part of the family. It is really sad, and we need to correct this injustice.

Let us imagine a farm worth \$10 million. That farm would be worth \$1.25 million more to the farmer after tax if he sells it to a stranger rather than a member of his own family. Unfortunately, sometimes that is the choice that has to be made. Farmers have to sell to strangers instead of passing the business down from one generation to the next, because the tax rules are unfair and completely unfavourable.

The problem with high land prices is that unrelated investors often have more interest in the land itself rather than farming it. Many farmers have to face really tough choices because of this. They have to choose between their hard-earned retirement and keeping production in the family.

Let us not forget that other factors also contribute to the challenges facing our family farms. My Conservative colleague mentioned this. We can talk about the government's role in border control, the government's failure to act on the diafiltered milk issue, and the completely unfair compensation for dairy farmers and processors under CETA. That is the situation facing our farmers and artisanal cheese producers in the regions. Things are really tough.

On top of that, in other agricultural sectors, farmers are really worried about the labour shortage. As we know, in the last budget, the government allocated very little money to agriculture.

•(1815)

All of the measures I listed that are designed to support supply management are really in the government's hands, but it seems disinclined to act or to protect it.

As the member for Berthier—Maskinongé, a rural riding, I understand how important this bill is to the people I represent.

I would like to briefly discuss the importance of small businesses to the regions. As I said earlier, small businesses are responsible for 80% of job creation in Canada. In Quebec, and in Canada as a whole, 98% of all businesses are small and medium-sized businesses.

The NDP believes we must do everything we can to ensure that businesses operate under the best possible conditions to stay competitive in a constantly changing market. The NDP will fight to protect our jobs and our family businesses.

Small businesses are the economic heart of our regions. We all have a favourite restaurant or corner store or a salon where we like to get our hair cut, and we have to support these businesses and encourage them. This is a step in the right direction. We are proud of it. We were all elected to try to introduce good legislative change.

I believe the situation in Berthier—Maskinongé is like that in my colleagues' ridings.

Bill C-274 will improve things. It is a step in the right direction. However, let us not forget that there are other areas we must improve in order to protect the regions. For example, the government promised to lower taxes from 11% to 9%. That is a broken promise. Let us not forget how important it is to develop high-speed Internet in the regions. We must support our family businesses and the government has to ensure that we have all the tools we need in the next strategic plan.

Our bill is widely supported. I know that my colleague already mentioned it, but there is a list of supporters two or three pages long.

I would like to read a quote by the president of the Canadian Federation of Agriculture:

Private Members' Business

Simply put, if taxation barriers are not addressed, we will see fewer and fewer family farms in Canada. We support [the commitment by the hon. member for Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques and his colleague] to addressing these tax burdens that could cause a significant administrative burden [and] cost...

The bill also has the support of the Association des marchands dépanneurs et épiciers du Québec.

It is unfair. Everyone knows there is work to be done. I think that we have had a good debate so far. However, it is important to ensure that this bill gets to committee. We must have the figures and know where they come from and we must be sure to present something that is going to improve the quality of life for the people living in rural areas who support our SMEs. This bill will really change things.

We hope to have the support of the House and to at least be able to refer this bill to committee. This bill will really change things for Canadians across the country.

● (1820)

[*English*]

The Deputy Speaker: Before we go to resuming debate and the hon. parliamentary secretary to the government House leader, I will just let him know that there are only about eight and a half minutes remaining in the time provided for private members' business. If he needs his full 10 minutes, of course he will have the remaining time when the House next takes up debate on the question.

The hon. parliamentary secretary to the government House leader.

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is with pleasure I rise today to address the private member's bill, Bill C-274.

In looking at the bill it is important that we recognize that what we are talking about is the transfer of money among family. When we talk about our farmers, small farms, and entrepreneurs, this is something that we are very sympathetic to. I do not necessarily agree with the manner in which the New Democratic member has chosen to try to implement something that most if not all members are very sympathetic to, that being the plight of our small farms and rural communities. There is very much a concerned attitude.

I know within our caucus we have a rural caucus that spends a great deal of time trying to address the many different issues that our rural communities, in particular farmers, are having to deal with. It is a wide spectrum of issues. It is important that we recognize that there is the lifetime capital gains exemption on resulting capital when, let us say, a parent transfers property over to a child. There are already today things in place that at least in part deal with what the member is hoping to achieve.

It is important that we recognize that Bill C-274 would weaken two long-standing anti-avoidance rules, something that the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance spent a great deal of time going over. It is very technical. I will avoid that because I believe that he covered it exceptionally well. I would also point out additionally that the bill would provide new opportunities for significant tax avoidance that would benefit high-net-worth individuals and result in the erosion of the tax base. We should all be somewhat concerned about that.

At times, we hear from members of this House, whether within our caucus or even from the New Democratic benches, more often than from the Conservative benches, about the issue of tax avoidance. We have a very proactive Minister of National Revenue who is constantly looking at ways to ensure that Canadians are indeed paying their fair share and looking at ways to close loopholes. Tax avoidance in Canada is a very serious issue. It is an issue that this government takes very seriously. If we can deal with that issue, it allows us to reshuffle that money in a more positive way, ensuring that there is a fairer sense of the way in which taxes are applied.

This weakening undermines the government's expressed intent to ensure that all Canadians pay their fair share of taxes, which ensures that middle-class Canadians have access to the government services that they truly deserve.

It is also important for us to recognize that this bill would send conflicting policy messages, given that we tightened one of the anti-avoidance rules that Bill C-274 proposes to relax, through the first budget implementation act. There is a contradiction there and we would suggest that the budget implementation is the best way to go because it is about tax fairness.

Again, I want to be clear that nothing currently prevents parents from selling the family company directly to their child and claiming the lifetime capital gains exemption on the resulting capital gain. That is a very important point to emphasize.

The proposal brought forward by the New Democratic member could easily be misused by corporations looking for tax-planning opportunities. It would cost the Treasury Board an estimated \$800 million a year, a number that would significantly increase in later years. Tax fairness, once again, is one of our core beliefs. Here as a government today, we have had member after member stand in this chamber and talk about the issue of tax fairness. I, for one, have mentioned it on numerous occasions and, no doubt, in the months and years ahead, we will continue to raise the issue of tax fairness, because it is indeed a part of our core beliefs.

● (1825)

No doubt, in the months and years ahead, we will continue to raise the issue of tax fairness, because it is part of our core belief. In that vein, we are currently undergoing a review of all tax expenditures to ensure that they are fair, efficient, and fiscally responsible.

I can assure members that we are currently engaged in pre-budget consultations. We will carefully examine the issue of family transfers in the context of fairness.

I would suggest that we would find it very challenging to find a minister of finance who has gone so far out of his way to ensure that there is consultation in every region of our country, both rural and urban. When we think of the family farm, I can assure the member that when we talk about pre-budget consultations, these are issues that have been raised with the Minister of Finance. For this particular budget that is coming out for 2017-18, things of this nature will have been taken into consideration in terms of how we can help small rural farms and entrepreneurs, which are the backbone of the economy in many ways.

I, for one, am very sensitive to our farming community. As a teenager, I can remember riding on tractors in the fields of family friends. I had the opportunity to get first-hand experience at a very young age of what takes place on farms and the important role they play.

In recent years I have had the opportunity, as all members have, to visit rural communities. One thing that comes to mind is the size of the farms. We talk about the cost of land, but when we look at the size, the infrastructure for farmers today is so much more than it was in previous years.

I was driving on Highway 2, late at night, and I could see a long line of lights coming at me. They were combines in the field in a long row taking the crops off the field. It was most impressive. It gives one a better appreciation of the role we play in providing food for the world. When I think of that, it goes back to, in many ways, the beginnings of the family farm and recognizing how important that community is to our country.

I can tell members that this is a government that is very sensitive to the needs of our farms. We see that virtually every day when the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food talks about the importance of supply management and the importance of taxation.

I understand that my time has run out. I look forward to being able to continue on another day.

• (1830)

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member for Winnipeg North will have a minute and a half remaining for his remarks when the House next takes up consideration of the motion.

The time provided for the consideration of private members' business has now expired, and the order is dropped to the bottom of the order of precedence on the Order Paper.

ADJOURNMENT PROCEEDINGS

A motion to adjourn the House under Standing Order 38 deemed to have been moved.

[*English*]

PUBLIC SERVICES AND PROCUREMENT

Mr. Erin Weir (Regina—Lewvan, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Phoenix payroll system began as a Conservative scheme to cut costs and cut corners by replacing complex federal government payrolls with off-the-shelf software from IBM. The Conservatives decided to operate this new system from Miramichi, New Brunswick for political reasons. The goal was to replace jobs lost due to the removal of the firearms centre even though experts on federal payrolls were not in Miramichi.

The Liberal government went ahead with implementing this ill-conceived scheme despite many warnings of problems. The government rushed ahead with phase 2 of Phoenix even after problems were uncovered with phase 1. The Liberal government removed the old payroll system that was functional without having established that the Phoenix system was working properly.

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This summer, the government had to acknowledge that some 80,000 federal public employees had been paid incorrectly or not at all as a result of problems with the Phoenix pay system. Some of us wondered why the government did not start writing cheques. Of course the Government of Canada has the ability to issue cheques. Indeed, every federal employee's first payment comes in the form of a paper cheque.

However, the Liberals assured us that Phoenix would be sorted out by the end of October.

When the Minister of Public Services appeared before the government operations committee on September 19, I asked whether the government was on track to meet that deadline of October 31. The minister assured our committee that the government was on track to meet that deadline. October 31 has come and gone.

On November 16, just last week, the government acknowledged that there were still 18,000 unresolved Phoenix cases from that original backlog. That is nearly one-quarter of the backlog that has still not been fixed.

The government has presented no timeline to deal with those remaining cases in the backlog and it has presented no plan to address the fact that employees will have incorrect figures on their T4 income tax forms if these cases are not resolved by the end of the calendar year, which is now just a few weeks away.

In addition to this backlog, new problems with Phoenix are cropping up every day. The government has decided to say that it is just not meeting its service standard as opposed to admitting that it is in addition to the backlog.

Also, on September 19, the minister said that she would appear again before the government operations committee around October 31 to update us on the government's progress with resolving the Phoenix pay system. Three weeks later and the minister has still not appeared before our committee.

I hope the parliamentary secretary will be able to provide us with some answers this evening.

• (1835)

Hon. John McKay (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate that this issue is of some vexation to the minister. She finds it completely unacceptable, the way that this matter has rolled out.

Public Services and Procurement Canada is taking decisive action on a number of fronts to identify and solve the pay issues. In terms of staffing, four temporary pay units in Winnipeg, Gatineau, Montreal, and Shawinigan were set up and staffed to handle employee cases. The employees at these pay units as well as those in the Public Service Pay Centre in Miramichi are putting in long hours to see that their colleagues across the country receive the pay they have earned. The minister deeply appreciates their effort and personally visited Miramichi, most recently, just two weeks ago.

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Actions have also been taken to make sure that public servants know how to use Phoenix. Employees across the Government of Canada have received additional training on how to submit their pay requests into Phoenix, and it is just a fact that planning for the implementation of Phoenix should have included more training in advance.

Online information tools, technical guides, and frequently asked questions are constantly updated, and the Phoenix system itself undergoes constant refinement based in part on feedback from human resources staff and other users. The goal is greater efficiency so that cases can be resolved more quickly. As a result of these efforts, and as employees become more accustomed to the system, we are seeing higher productivity.

It is true, as the hon. member suggested, that the department did not meet its October 31 deadline to eliminate the backlog of employee cases. The cases that remain are the those that are complex, requiring research to track down missing steps and manual input by compensation advisors. Many, if not most, of these cases existed before Phoenix was introduced, and dedicated effort is under way to resolve these cases as quickly as possible.

At the same time, the government has taken a number of measures to alleviate the pressures on employees who have experienced pay problems. For example, employees can request emergency salary advances through their own departments. A repayment process is being set up to ensure that those who have been overpaid as a result of pay issues can choose the repayment options that best suit their needs. For employees who have incurred out-of-pocket expenses as a result of missing pay, such as financial penalties for missed or late payments, Treasury Board has put in place a claims process and a form that can be found on the Canada.ca website.

Our goal is to reach a steady state where pay requests are processed consistently, with minimal errors, and in a reasonable time period. Many people have worked long hours to get us to this steady state. We are indebted to them, and we will get there.

Again, on behalf of the minister, these issues are unacceptable to the minister.

Mr. Erin Weir: Mr. Speaker, the minister has not shown up at committee to address Phoenix, and now the parliamentary secretary for public services has not shown up to this evening's adjournment debate. I believe that an important part of showing leadership and taking ownership of the situation is actually being present, not hiding behind the deputy minister in public presentations, and not having another parliamentary secretary come forward during an adjournment debate.

What did we hear from the parliamentary secretary for national defence?

We heard about temporary pay centres, and we know the government is spending almost \$50 million on those. We heard about compensation to employees who have missed bills as a result of not receiving the money they have earned. The government admits that it has no estimate as to how much that is going to cost.

Therefore, Phoenix remains a huge boondoggle. The government has not provided any sense of when it is going to be fixed or how much it is going to cost to fix it. I hope that the parliamentary

secretary for national defence can provide some answers during his final minute.

• (1840)

The Deputy Speaker: I would remind the hon. member for Regina—Lewvan that, although we are in adjournment proceedings and there are no points of order and such, nonetheless we adopt the same general principles that we apply to other debates in this place, and we avoid references to the absence or presence of members. I did note that the member made a reference to a minister's presence before committee, which is not out of bounds, but certainly as it relates to the chamber here, yes, this is something to keep an eye on for the future.

The hon. Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence

Hon. John McKay: Mr. Speaker, I regret that I am not going to make the hon. member very happy tonight.

The minister finds that there is no question that this is an unacceptable situation. Her priority remains to ensure that employees get paid in a timely fashion. She asked me to thank all of the employees who are working tirelessly to try to rectify the situation that is not of their own making. This is unacceptable and is also something on which a number of people are working on furiously, for which we are deeply grateful.

FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Mr. James Bezan (Selkirk—Interlake—Eastman, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is good to be able to get up again to address a question I raised after Remembrance Day, as I was not satisfied with the answer from the Minister of National Defence.

As members may recall, the Minister of National Defence, at Remembrance Day services in Vancouver, announced that Canada was going to be sending our troops on a UN mission that was going to go on for three years, and that was going to be all over the place, even though the chief of the defence staff at one point had said that there was going to be no African mission.

The minister has now said that there is not going to be just one mission but many missions in Africa and that we are going to be there for three years. It is going to involve 600 troops and \$450 million. Then, of course, the Minister of National Defence's press secretary had to retract the minister's statement, saying that he got a little bit ahead of himself about where the government is at.

This is a problem with the Liberal government on this file, and on many others. It is the lack of transparency. It is pushing out the idea of going on a UN mission, partially to garner a seat at the UN Security Council, and partially to say that it has carried through on one of its campaign promises, that of returning Canada's military to peacekeeping.

We know that the minister has great interest in Mali. He just returned from there in recent weeks. We know that this is one of the most dangerous missions in the world, and is definitely the most dangerous mission in Africa. Over 106 peacekeepers on the UN mission have already been killed. That is not even counting the French troops who are there. There are over 4,000 French troops on the ground and 13,000 peacekeepers. It is the biggest mess going on with numerous different jihadist terrorist groups pledging alliance to ISIS and al Qaeda. They are using blue helmets for target practice.

There is no question that we have the best troops in the world. They are well trained; they are ready to go to war at the drop of a hat. They like to be deployed and they like to be in theatre. We believe that our armed forces, the brave men and women who serve this country, are more than adequately trained and equipped to do the job in the right mission.

Should they be fighting terrorism? Of course they should. Should they be helping stop the migrant flow, and helping in the migrant crisis that we are seeing from Syria and North Africa to Europe and elsewhere? Yes, they should. However, is the UN mission the right place to go?

If we are going to have this discussion, and if the government wants to be transparent, we need to have that debate in the House of Commons, so all parliamentarians have the opportunity to pronounce themselves. It has to be voted on before we put any of our troops in harm's way. We have already established the normal practice here, that before troops are deployed, we have a vote.

I have to point out, talking about missions in Africa and how dangerous they are, Anthony Banbury, former United Nations assistant secretary general for field support, said:

Our most grievous blunder is in Mali. In early 2013, the United Nations decided to send 10,000 soldiers and police officers to Mali in response to a terrorist takeover of parts of the north. Inexplicably, we sent a force that was unprepared for counterterrorism and explicitly told not to engage in it. More than 80 percent of the force's resources are spent on logistics and self-protection. Already 56 people in the United Nations contingent have been killed, and more are certain to die. The United Nations in Mali is day by day marching deeper into its first quagmire.

We have had this type of experience before, in Rwanda, Somalia, and the UN mission in Bosnia. The only way we fixed Bosnia was to turn it into a NATO mission. Our suggestion to the government is that if it wants to put our troops on the ground to do counterterrorism and stop the migrant crisis in North Africa, it should be as part of a NATO contingent, not under the quagmire that exists in the United Nations.

● (1845)

Hon. John McKay (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to point out at the outset that since no decision has been made, there is nothing to put in front of Parliament. If we have nothing to put in front of Parliament, there is nothing to debate. If there is nothing to put before Parliament and there is no debate, then no vote would follow from that. I encourage the hon. member to at least wait until the government, in the fullness of time, can make a decision, whether it is decided here or somewhere else.

I would also point out that the minister has travelled to Africa several times. He is a hands-on minister. He is checking out a variety of options and opportunities. He has travelled there with Madam

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Justice Arbour and retired Lieutenant-General Dallaire, two of Canada's foremost conflict resolution people. Of course, he takes their advice, along with a variety of other people's advice, in trying to assess what would be an appropriate role for Canada to take.

I would say to my hon. colleague that until the decision is made and the information is assembled, it is a little premature to talk about a parliamentary debate and vote.

Last weekend I had the great good fortune to be at the Halifax International Security Forum. Of course, there was a lot of discussion about a lot of issues. Members can imagine one of the issues that was first and foremost in many people's minds, but the one that is relevant to tonight's discussion was on Mosul or post-Mosul. I do not want to get ahead of ourselves. There is a long road to go before we are done with Mosul, but the question in the conversations was what will happen to the fighters who come out of Mosul. Not all of them will die or commit suicide or do something really crazy. They will kind of leak out. Some will go to Raqqa. Some might go to Syria. Some might well make some effort to destabilize Europe, but some will go into the Sinai to destabilize the Egyptian government. Some will go to Libya and from Libya, some will go into the Sahel region.

If we look at the potential conflict from a global level, we will realize that what we are doing in Mosul and the Middle East is as important as what we might be doing in African countries. It needs to be looked at, so to speak, as a web of conflict. In that respect, the Canadian military has an immense ability and very capable people who could contribute to conflict reduction, even in, as the hon. member suggests, areas that are inherently dangerous. However, at this point, I would respectfully suggest to the hon. member that his concern about transparency is entirely misplaced. No decision has been made, and until a decision is made, there is really nothing to debate or vote on.

● (1850)

Mr. James Bezan: Mr. Speaker, for not making a decision, there seems to be a lot of information coming from the government on what it thinks should happen. The decision is imminent. It knows where it is going and is not telling Canadians, not telling our troops, and definitely not telling parliamentarians what the goal is, what the plan is, and how it is in our national interest.

It all comes down to the fact that if we are going to be sending our troops to deal with dangerous jihadist organizations, as we are doing in Iraq, we should send them over with the right equipment, the right command and control, and the right rules of engagement. Even though the government likes to say that what we are doing in Mosul is non-combat, what we are seeing is that our troops are taking the offensive as they continue with the attack against ISIS.

If we are going to go into northern Africa, whether it is in Mali, the Sudan, the Central African Republic or the Republic of the Congo, we need to go in, first and foremost, with the ability and equipment to combat terrorism.

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The difference between what is happening in Africa versus what we see right now in Iraq is that at least we have local government troops and the Kurdish peshmerga fighting alongside. That does not exist in Africa, and that is why it is so dangerous. There is no peace to keep. We cannot send our troops into a peacekeeping operation where they are putting their lives on the line for nobody, other than a photo op for the Prime Minister so he can get a seat at the UN Security Council.

Hon. John McKay: Mr. Speaker, it is a bit of a contradiction in terms to start peacekeeping operations in countries that are peaceful. This is not a Hawaiian vacation. By definition, if we are conducting peacekeeping operations, we are going into areas where there is no peace, so we will be specifying, under the appropriate rules of engagement and the appropriate chapter in the UN charter, what the rules of engagement will be. They will be appropriate and we will retain Canadian control over what our troops do.

As I said previously, the assessment is still being made and the information is still being gathered. We are taking the best advice possibly available to us prior to making a decision. If and when a decision is made, the rules of engagement will be appropriate. It will be likely a chapter 7 mission, our troops will be appropriately resourced, and hopefully we will contribute to the reduction of conflict in that area.

[*Translation*]

HOUSING

Ms. Marjolaine Boutin-Sweet (Hochelaga, NDP): Mr. Speaker, on September 30, 2016, several mayors and leaders in the housing sector, led by the mayor of Toronto, rallied together to sound the alarm on the social housing crisis facing our country. Despite the announcements the government made in the last budget, the fact is that much more is needed to preserve the existing social housing stock, which is aging and requires extensive renovations.

In Toronto alone, it is estimated that over \$2.6 billion would be needed to fix the existing housing. Meanwhile, across the country, over 170,000 families are waiting for social housing. Canadian municipalities do not have sufficient financial resources to meet the demand and they are waiting for the federal government to make a much larger commitment. The equation is simple, however: the longer we wait, the more the situation deteriorates, which means more existing social housing units will have to be condemned and abandoned, while the wait lists will only get longer.

In addition, municipalities are concerned about what will become of federal funding associated with long-term operating agreements that are about to expire. It is important to note that, since 2006, 46,000 social housing units in Canada have been affected by the expiry of long-term agreements that allowed social housing operators to subsidize their low-income renters. By the end of 2017, nearly 100,000 more households will face uncertainty about their rent subsidy.

In his mandate letter to the minister, the Prime Minister clearly directed him to develop a strategy to re-establish the federal government's role in supporting affordable housing that includes providing support to municipalities to maintain rent-geared-to-income subsidies in co-ops. The Prime Minister probably forgot to mention that not-for-profit housing organizations and low-income

housing organizations also offer similar rent subsidies. Let us assume that the minister was given a mandate to address this worrisome situation comprehensively.

The problem is that every time they answer our questions, they talk about agreements set to expire in the future, and they put off any final decision about it. In the meantime, agreements are still expiring, and there is no way to know what will happen to those that have already expired. All they tell us is that there is a budget to maintain rent subsidies for housing units administered by the CMHC.

This federal assistance is only temporary as it is being provided for two years. In addition, the budget does not cover housing administered by the provinces or, in certain cases, by municipalities, as is the case for low-income housing across the country. Therefore, this does not address the problem that mayors of major Canadian cities have raised.

“What We Heard”, the report on the consultations held to help shape a Canadian housing strategy, stated the following:

Canadians told us that social housing was an essential component to include in the NHS. Over 90% of respondents to the NHS online survey ranked social housing renewal and subsidized housing as “important” or “very important”...Social housing also featured strongly in Canadians’ written submissions, appearing in 37% of uploaded documents, and was also often mentioned in the focus group and roundtable discussions.

This means that social housing is vitally important for the majority of people concerned by the housing issue. This is also true for the NDP, as was noted in the brief it submitted during the consultation process. I even once again moved Motion M-53, to renew funding for social housing in Canada.

I am therefore asking the minister or the parliamentary secretary yet again: what does the minister plan to do to meet these demands and resolve the issue of funding for social housing in Canada once and for all?

• (1855)

[*English*]

Mr. Terry Duguid (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Families, Children and Social Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the hon. member for Hochelaga for her passionate advocacy for affordable and social housing.

As I have noted in the past, ensuring that Canadians have access to housing that meets their needs and they can afford is a key priority for the government. The member will know that the social infrastructure investments in budget 2016 are an integral part of the government's strategy to create a more inclusive society and stronger and more sustainable development.

The budget included \$3.4 billion over five years for social infrastructure, including affordable housing, early learning and child care, cultural and recreational infrastructure, and community health care on first nation reserves. Of this amount, \$2.3 billion will be invested in housing.

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Among other measures, we are doubling federal funding under the investment in affordable housing program, a collaborative initiative with the provinces and territories to build, renovate, and provide critical affordable housing across Canada. This investment is expected to benefit more than 100,000 Canadian households.

Budget 2016 also provides \$574 million over two years to repair and improve the energy and water efficiency of existing social housing units. The hon. member has mentioned these. It is a measure that the member for Hochelaga has called for in the House and that we have delivered.

Significant new funding is also being provided to increase affordable housing for seniors, to improve housing and living conditions in northern Inuit and first nation communities, and to build and renovate shelters for the victims of family violence.

I am pleased to say that the bilateral agreements have been signed with nearly all provinces and territories to deliver these new housing investments under the framework of the investment in affordable housing program. Federal funding is already flowing to these communities, including my own province of Manitoba.

As for resolving the issue of expiring long-term social housing agreements, budget 2016 provides up to \$30 million to renew existing subsidies for all federally administered social housing projects with operating agreements expiring in the next two years. For projects administered by the provinces and territories, the doubling of federal funding for the investment in affordable housing program provides a significant source of funding for provinces and territories to extend subsidies for these social housing units. These investments are a transitional measure to bridge the gap for the next two years until a new approach can be implemented under a national housing strategy.

Speaking of the national housing strategy, we have recently completed an extensive four-month consultation process on how we can improve housing outcomes for Canadians. We wanted to hear from a broad range of stakeholders, because we recognize that the Government of Canada had neither all the answers nor all the tools needed to address persistent housing problems.

We sought the advice and input of key national housing stakeholders. We have held round tables outside Ottawa on housing challenges in the north and for indigenous communities in urban and remote communities. To ensure that we heard the voices of vulnerable people, focus groups were held with those who have been homeless or living in subsidized housing, newcomers to Canada, and persons with disabilities, among others. CMHC is also working closely with Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada on parallel consultations for improving housing outcomes for our first nation communities.

On November 22, National Housing Day in Canada, the Minister of Families, Children and Social Development released a report detailing what we heard during the consultations. I encourage the member for Hochelaga, and indeed all members, to read the report, which contains some great ideas on how the Government of Canada can work with other stakeholders to deliver the housing outcomes that Canadians deserve.

In the meantime, work is continuing on a national housing strategy, and we will keep the House informed as we move forward.

● (1900)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Marjolaine Boutin-Sweet: Mr. Speaker, I read the report and I also met with representatives from the Federation of Canadian Municipalities, the FCM, this week.

In its submission for the consultations on a national housing strategy, the Federation of Canadian Municipalities recommends detailed, costed investments in housing over eight years. It calls for the protection of existing social housing, which means investing in the necessary renovations, and maintaining the subsidies for low-income households in order to mitigate the impact of the expiry of the long-term social housing operating agreements.

The FCM also recommends investing in building new social housing and in housing for indigenous peoples and in northern communities. It also proposes doubling to \$350 million the investment in the homelessness partnering strategy.

Will the minister work with the municipalities, listen to the FCM, and invest the necessary funding to resolve the housing crisis and effectively fight homelessness in the next budget?

[*English*]

Mr. Terry Duguid: Mr. Speaker, I can only reiterate that we have already taken steps to address concerns raised by the member. Indeed, I think all of us have been meeting with the FCM this week to hear about its concerns, and we are acting on them.

Once again, budget 2016 includes \$2.3 billion in new investments over the next two years to address the most pressing housing needs in the short term. However, money is only a part of the solution. We need innovative new approaches to addressing persistent housing problems in communities across Canada, a point that the FCM has made loudly.

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I would reiterate that we have consulted widely and we have listened. Housing is such an important component of our government's overall approach to strengthening the middle class, promoting inclusive growth for Canadians and helping to lift more people out of poverty.

[*Translation*]

The Deputy Speaker: The motion to adjourn the House is now deemed to have been adopted. Accordingly, this House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 10 a.m., pursuant to Standing Order 24(1).

(The House adjourned at 7:04 p.m.)

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