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Speaker: The Honourable Geoff Regan

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HOUSE OF COMMONS

Friday, March 10, 2017

The House met at 10 a.m.

Prayer

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

● (1005)

[*English*]

NATIONAL SECURITY AND INTELLIGENCE COMMITTEE OF PARLIAMENTARIANS ACT

The House resumed from March 8 consideration of Bill C-22, an Act to establish the National Security and Intelligence Committee of Parliamentarians and to make consequential amendments to certain Acts, as reported (with amendment) from the committee, and of the motions in Group No. 1.

Ms. Joyce Murray (Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Treasury Board, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to join this debate on Bill C-22, an act to establish the national security and intelligence committee of parliamentarians. It is a bill that would at long last enable Canadian parliamentarians to scrutinize our national security framework and our national security agencies, as our Five Eyes partners have been doing for years.

The creation of this committee would be part of achieving the dual objectives of keeping Canadians safe while safeguarding our rights and freedoms. It would also stand us in great stead among our international partners. In fact, the new Canadian committee would raise the bar for national security accountability worldwide.

I will touch on a bit of the history behind Bill C-22.

For many years, a great many Canadians, including me as an MP, have called for the creation of such a committee. The government of Paul Martin put forward a proposal that, unfortunately, died on the order paper.

[*Translation*]

Issues pertaining to the need for better oversight of national security organizations were discussed in 2008 in Justice Frank Iacobucci's Internal Inquiry into the Actions of Canadian Officials in Relation to Abdullah Almalki, Ahmad Abou-Elmaati and Muayyed Nureddin, and in 2006 in Justice Dennis O'Connor's Report of the Events Relating to Maher Arar.

[*English*]

While the Conservatives were in power, both the private member's bill, Bill C-551, from the member for Malpeque, and my own private member's bill, Bill C-622, were tabled, as was a bill with bipartisan support in the Senate, all of which would have seen this committee created years ago.

My bill, Bill C-622, which called for the creation of a parliamentary committee of oversight, built on the two previous bills and also included an additional set of measures to increase the transparency and accountability of the Communications Security Establishment. It would have put metadata under the law and created a framework of accountability for acquiring, storing, or sharing information inadvertently or advertently collected. However, the timing of my bill was very interesting, because the final discussion and vote took place one week after the attack on Parliament, which had been preceded by two deadly attacks on Canadian soldiers. At that time, there was a great deal of concern about the security of Canadians, due to radicalization and potential terrorism.

In the remarks following the attack on Parliament, it was remarkable that all party leaders confirmed their commitment to protect the rights, freedoms, and civil liberties of Canadians, even as security measures were to be analyzed and strengthened. Indeed, Canadians expect these fundamental aspects of their very democracy being guarded to be respected. That kind of attention to security measures and privacy is the underlying intention of Bill C-22.

At the time, in 2014, I invited members of all parties to support sending my bill to committee for further examination and to signal the authenticity of their commitment to protecting privacy at the same time as strengthening security in Canada. Unfortunately, instead, the previous prime minister instructed his Conservative members to vote against Bill C-622, even though all members of the Liberal Party and all other parties in the House, including one brave Conservative member, voted for it. The bill failed. It was not passed.

However, I am now happy to see the government following through on the spirit of my bill, Bill C-622. I was proud to campaign on the promise of delivering stronger national security oversight by parliamentarians, and Bill C-22 delivers on that promise.

It is regrettable that it has taken so long, but we can be proud as the members of Parliament who will, I am confident, finally bring this essential parliamentary body into being. After all, as the federal and provincial privacy commissioners stated in the fall 2014 communiqué, "Canadians both expect and are entitled to equal protection for their privacy and access rights and for their security. We must uphold these fundamental rights that lie at the heart of Canada's democracy."

[*Translation*]

I followed with interest as the members of the Standing Committee on Public Safety and National Security studied this piece of legislation, proposed and debated amendments, and amended the bill, frequently with the support of several parties.

I want to emphasize what a pleasant change this is from working under the previous government, whose members viewed government bills as sacrosanct.

● (1010)

[*English*]

That was especially the case with laws concerning security measures. As we know, Bill C-51 followed shortly after the tragedies of the attacks on soldiers and on Parliament and was pushed through, essentially with no amendments, despite the deep concerns of Canadians.

[*Translation*]

I feel that many of the committee's amendments improve the bill and the new committee it will establish.

[*English*]

For example, the committee amended clause 8 to expand the scope of the committee's mandate. When it comes to examining activities carried out by national security or intelligence agencies, the power of a minister to determine that the examination would be injurious to national security would now be time limited to the period during which the activity was actually happening. Once it was no longer ongoing, the minister would be required to inform the committee and the committee could then undertake its examination. I support this change.

[*Translation*]

I also support the amendment that gives the committee chair a vote only in the case of a tie as well as the NDP's addition of a clause requiring the committee to inform the appropriate minister of the discovery of any activity that may not be in compliance with the law.

I also support some of the changes to the exemptions that were in clause 14 initially, the information to which committee members were not entitled.

[*English*]

I agree with the public safety committee that the new committee of parliamentarians should be able to receive information about ongoing defence intelligence activities supporting military operations. I support that it should have access to information considered privileged under the Investment Canada Act and that it should have access to information collected by FINTRAC, the Financial Transactions and Reports Analysis Centre of Canada.

There were certain changes made by the committee that were not accepted by the government, for a variety of reasons. For example, there is the amendment currently before the House to reintroduce clause 16, which would allow a minister to prevent the release of information that constitutes special operating information under the Security of Information Act, when disclosing it could be injurious to national security. This kind of authority exists in the case of other equivalent committees in similar parliamentary systems around the world. Moreover, Bill C-22 would still require the minister to give written reasons for preventing the release of information, and Parliament would be informed of each occasion on which this authority was used.

This legislation is a major leap forward for Canadian national security accountability. The new committee of parliamentarians would not only provide Canadians with the assurance that their elected representatives, the MPs in Parliament, were on watch to strengthen the protection of their essential civil rights but would also help identify opportunities to improve on current mechanisms for defending their security. In fact, effective protection of individual privacy and effective delivery of national security measures are not a balance, a dichotomy, or a trade-off. They are complementary, and both are necessary.

The United States Department of Homeland Security, for example, considers safeguarding civil rights and liberties to be critical to its work to protect its nation from the many threats it faces. This third-largest department of the U.S. government now explicitly embeds and enforces privacy protections and transparency in all the department's systems, programs, and activities.

In 2014, deputy secretary Mayorkas confirmed in a Department of Homeland Security speech that not only is this an integral part of the DHS mission and crucial to maintaining the public's trust but it has resulted in Homeland Security becoming a stronger and more effective department.

The original version of Bill C-22, as presented by the government at first reading, was already lauded by experts, and it has only become stronger with the amendments accepted from the public safety committee. Crucially, the bill requires that the act be reviewed by Parliament five years after coming into force, so all of the discussions we are having here in Parliament can be reviewed and the bill can be changed as appropriate.

I am proud to have contributed to the conversation leading to Bill C-22. I am pleased that our government has taken this essential step forward in protecting fundamental Canadian security and freedoms. Ultimately, the bill before us today would make Canadians safer and help ensure that our rights and freedoms are better protected. It has been a long time coming. I invite all hon. members to join me in making it happen.

● (1015)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Ruth Ellen Brosseau (Berthier—Maskinongé, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for her speech.

In 2014, the Prime Minister, the Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, and nine other ministers voted for Bill C-622, a bill that would have established an oversight committee with unfettered access and subpoena powers.

Is the member disappointed? Why is the government trying to take tools away from the committee that Bill C-22 would establish?

Ms. Joyce Murray: Mr. Speaker, I thank the NDP member for her question.

I want to point out that today is a historic day. A bill like this one to create a committee of parliamentarians to oversee, improve, scrutinize, and analyze the activities and operations of over a dozen security intelligence agencies is unprecedented in Canada.

These kinds of activities were carried out in the dark. We had to have faith, without any oversight as parliamentarians, and that must stop. I think this is worth celebrating, and I hope the member will join me.

Ms. Anne Minh-Thu Quach (Salaberry—Suroît, NDP): Mr. Speaker, despite my colleague's speech, I think that Canadians expect Parliament to have a truly effective watchdog that has some real teeth.

If we want to strengthen the confidence of Canadians in our public security and intelligence agencies, we need to ensure real oversight. We need to give this oversight committee the tools and autonomy needed to be effective.

In 2004, an all-party committee looked at the issue of an oversight committee. After visiting some allied countries, members of that committee concluded that, without full access to classified information, the oversight committee would not be able to complete its task.

However, the bill before us today places a number of limitations on the rights of MPs, even though MPs would have security clearance and would be bound to secrecy.

Does the parliamentary secretary not have sufficient confidence in the members to grant them full access to as much information as possible, rather than trying to restrict that information?

Ms. Joyce Murray: Mr. Speaker, I agree with the first part of the NDP member's question. We want an oversight committee that is as effective as possible. That is what Bill C-22 promises and I am proud of that.

I am also very pleased that we have a government that accepts amendments proposed by opposition party members. We are making history because for 10 years, hon. members were unable to contribute to improving government bills. Now, committees operate in such a way that members of all parties can contribute to creating a more effective framework. That is what the committee did and the government accepted several proposed amendments.

● (1020)

[*English*]

Hon. Peter Van Loan (York—Simcoe, CPC): Mr. Speaker, one of the most important duties of any national government is the safety and security of its citizens. That is what people look to the government for, that is what they trust their government will do, and that is indeed one of our most important obligations here in this House, but more importantly for any government in Canada.

I come to this debate as a former public safety minister. While aware of the national security threats that we face as a country and how we work to deal with those threats, it also means that I understand full well that there are very good reasons that one might not want to have a committee such as this. Those arguments have been articulated in the past.

On the one hand, for example, one could argue that our national security agencies conduct themselves with the utmost professionalism and that the existing oversight mechanisms we have are adequate and do a fine job in providing oversight of those mechanisms to protect the public interest. I think all of us would agree that is indeed largely the case here in Canada today, and I think it is clear that the Liberal government has concluded the same, based on the approach it is taking to the bill.

The second argument that we hear from time to time is that we cannot really trust politicians, especially those with a partisan interest, with this kind of sensitive security information. If they see a partisan gain to be had, they will find some way to use that information to their advantage, even if it would hurt national security.

The Liberals have clearly concluded that they believe both of these two perspectives. However, they are stuck with a problem. The problem is that notwithstanding their conclusions on this front, they have this promise from the last election to establish an all-party national oversight committee. They feel they must somehow fulfill that promise. They noted when they were out campaigning that Canada is "the sole nation among our Five Eyes allies whose elected officials cannot scrutinize security operations". Therefore, they come to us with a bill today that ensures that parliamentarians will not be able to scrutinize national security operations, i.e., their solution does not address what they say was their problem.

The Liberals' solution indicates that they do not believe we can trust politicians, which is one of those arguments for not having such a body in the first place. What we are dealing with here is a fascinating shell game. We are establishing something that has the name, national security committee of parliamentarians, but it is not a parliamentary committee; it is a committee of parliamentarians. It seems to belong to the Prime Minister as his personal group, but it is not a parliamentary committee. It has none of those privileges. It is simply an empty shell, with none of the powers we would think such a committee would have.

While we are going through a tremendous charade to pretend we are carrying through on a commitment to do something from the election, we are creating it in name but not in substance.

That is the problem we have in the Conservative Party. I believe it is legitimate to have a perspective where we make those arguments and say we will not have a parliamentary oversight committee because of those reasons, because our existing system works well: "We think our bodies do well. We are concerned about trusting politicians." We could say that, or we could say that those statements are not true: "We really do need to have parliamentary oversight." Then, we can actually create it. The bill does not create it. It is consistent. In fact, one of the ironies is that the underlying premise of the argument that we cannot trust politicians is proven by this bill. The Liberals went out there and told Canadians they would do something, and they are not. They are doing something very different. They are proving that very argument by their actions in this case.

This committee, as I said, is not a parliamentary committee. It has none of the associated powers and privileges of a parliamentary committee, and, by its structure, is isolated and cut off entirely from this parliamentary process. Members will see that it does not have the ability to appeal to the rights that one has as parliamentarians by virtue of our long-standing traditions in this House of Commons, and which for centuries of the Westminster system has worked.

The body is not a parliamentary committee; it is a committee merely of parliamentarians. The bill before us ensures that the body cannot scrutinize ongoing operations, and it says that when the operations are complete then of course it can reflect upon them. However, in this day and age, there is no such thing.

● (1025)

As a former public safety minister, I can say that no investigation is ever complete. The principal threat that we face, as the public safety department and the government assess in their national security priorities documents on the terrorism front, is the threat of Islamic extremist terrorism. Every time we have had such an incident, though, even when the incident is over and the perpetrator may be killed, the fact is that investigations continue with the people they have dealt with, in the context they have had, and the networks they have, and these investigations continue on and on. By their very nature, they do not come to a conclusion.

By the definitions of the exclusions that have been created for this committee, they are effectively, de facto, excluded from ever dealing with anything of substance that is actually happening on the national security front. Then, ironically, most of all, the authority that it would be given to seek information, to ask for documents, the mandate it would be given and the realms in which it can investigate, are more limited than the existing oversight bodies that are doing their work. They are duplicative, but more narrow. They are not even in other areas. They are in the exact same areas, but they are more narrow.

Therefore, it is a paper shell that is being proposed by the government. It is a meaningless shell. It certainly underlines those two principal arguments that I made in the first case about why the government probably has come to the conclusion that it would not, if it had its preferences and had not made such a rash promise in the last election, be proceeding with this committee.

Let us deal with the first of those arguments, whether our existing national security organizations do their jobs well and have adequate oversight. I can say, I think without compromising any oaths or laws, that our Canadian Security Intelligence Service is highly professional. We are very fortunate to have it working for us. I believe the men and women in that organization are second to none. They provide a service to Canadians that has kept us safe countless times.

They resist any temptation to put themselves in the spotlight, to tell success stories of their work, but there is a myriad of success stories of their work. The threats that they have shut down, which we have never ever heard about, that they have neutralized, prevented from happening, have identified, and appropriately tracked to protect us are numerous. We can be very proud of the work of the Canadian Security Intelligence Service. It is indeed highly professional.

I have heard occasional criticisms of individuals on the Security Intelligence Review Committee. After all, a lot of them are politicians and people like to criticize politicians. However, I have never heard any substantive criticisms of the work they have done being inadequate. We can conclude that both the organization and the oversight have worked very well.

Another one of the three organizations that we are dealing with, the Communications Security Establishment, is outstanding. It is a second-to-none, world-class operation, and we can commend its work. Fortunately, most of us do not know the work that it does, which is the way it is supposed to be, but I can assure everyone that it does outstanding work. I have never ever heard a single credible criticism of the quality of work done by the commissioner of the Communications Security Establishment. Again, it is high quality.

The RCMP is a bit of a different body. One of the difficulties is that we ask our police to spread themselves across an incredibly large mandate, everything from local and municipal policing to counterterrorism investigations, to dealing with money laundering, to dealing with very sophisticated financial transactions. It is a mandate that is truly broad, so their work is not always perfect. However, that being said, the work of Ian McPhail and the Civilian Review and Complaints Commission has been excellent. I have not heard any credible complaints. They are providing very high-quality reviews.

When I look at these, I can see that the government has concluded there is not a problem. However, Liberals have talked about it in opposition, whipping up a frenzy of concerns. They do not really share that. They do not really believe that. At the end of day, they honestly do not believe politicians should have oversight. That is why they have created this limited scope, this inability. In fact, as I said, this body would become a pale duplication. It is a duplication of the existing oversight, but it is a pale duplication. The committee of parliamentarians will have less power than those existing oversight bodies that we talked about that are doing their work.

● (1030)

Not only will it have less scope, but the government almost implicitly in this bill acknowledges embarrassment that it is creating a body that is merely a duplication with fewer powers. It does that with an entire clause, clause 9 of the bill, that requires the review bodies and this new committee to "avoid any unnecessary duplication of work." The government has actually acknowledged it is asking this committee to do the exact same thing. Just a little slice of it is all the government is going to let the committee do and please, no duplication.

At one point in time when this was proposed, I thought that as a former public safety minister, it would be great for me to be on this committee. Now I look at this committee as it is being proposed by the government, and it is such a meaningless shell. I can assure every member in this House who is interested in serving on it that they are going to find it a very frustrating and empty experience, because they are not going to see too much and they are not going to have much power to actually do anything. Certainly, it is a far cry from a substantive committee such as we see, for example, south of the border.

Mr. Francis Drouin (Glengarry—Prescott—Russell, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, one of the issues that will be addressed with this committee is if there are issues that arise in the RCMP or CSIS, that particular committee will be able to follow the evidence from the RCMP to CSIS, or from CSIS to the RCMP. Right now the review bodies cannot do that.

Would the member not agree that this is a big improvement with regard to that particular committee? It can follow the evidence from the RCMP to CSIS. Right now that cannot be done.

Hon. Peter Van Loan: Mr. Speaker, that is an optimistic hope. The committee might be able to do that on something that happened 25 years ago. However, the exclusions in this mean that the committee cannot deal with anything that is an existing operation. I have already laid out why anything that has happened in the past five to 10 years on the counterterrorism front still have threads out there as parts of active investigations. The committee is not going to be able to get the information.

The powers here, by definition, if there is an intelligence failure, the committee cannot go there and investigate that. If there is an abuse, the committee cannot go there because it is going to be part of such an ongoing evaluation, or it is going to be a threat or "injurious to national security". Those are the magic words they are using.

If the committee thinks the priorities that the government is pursuing or that our intelligence agencies are pursuing are wrong, the committee cannot investigate that because that would be injurious to national security. If the committee thought that some of the techniques it wanted to look at were inappropriate, it cannot do that either because that would also fall under the exclusion that talking about that would be injurious to national security.

The fact is this committee would simply be a powerless paper tiger that exists for one purpose, like a window or hood ornament on a vehicle, to decorate the fact and suggest that the government has kept a promise that it has not really kept at all.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Anne Minh-Thu Quach (Salaberry—Suroît, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his speech.

It is incumbent on the committee to verify, in the most independent and effective way possible, whether the government is fulfilling its role of ensuring the safety of Canadians.

Is the hon. member not the least bit concerned about the government 's insistence that the chair of this oversight committee be appointed by the Prime Minister and not elected by the members of the committee, as is the case with most of our allies?

[*English*]

Hon. Peter Van Loan: Mr. Speaker, my concerns are much deeper than that. By nature, any chair who comes out of Parliament is going to be a partisan person. That is life. That is part of why the government wants a committee of parliamentarians. It is putting value in that democratic oversight, if that is what it is doing. My concerns are much deeper than that.

I think people have a sense that somehow a committee like this could have some substantive oversight. Let us take, for example, a serious intelligence failure, where we had questions about whether our national security agencies had done the right things. Could the committee actually go there with this, if it cannot ask for information and cannot investigate things that are part of an ongoing operation?

Let us take the 9/11 terrorist attacks as an example. The year 2001 was a decade and a half ago. Guess what? Investigations into that in the United States continue. There are people in Guantanamo Bay still today related to that in one way or another. There are folks around the world where they are trying to come up with cases for prosecution to pursue them. These things are all still very active a decade and a half later. By definition, an intelligence failure that would have led to an event like that here in Canada would be foreclosed from investigation by this committee because it would be dealing with an ongoing operation.

The fact is this is a committee that exists in name and decoration only with absolutely no powers. That is what the Liberal Party is proposing. It is very different from what anybody believed the Liberals were proposing when they were asking for the support of Canadians to form government.

● (1035)

Mr. Scott Simms (Coast of Bays—Central—Notre Dame, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate this opportunity to speak to Bill C-22, the national security and intelligence committee of parliamentarians act.

We have now had the benefits of a healthy debate as we have witnessed today and prior to this, of course, at second reading and at committee stage. I would like to thank the members of the Standing Committee on Public Safety and National Security for their helpful analysis and of course for their hard work.

As many have said today and prior to today, this legislation is long overdue. We have heard stakeholders call it "crucial" and affirm that it would establish a Canadian committee stronger than its international counterparts. It would fill a significant gap that has existed in Canada for far too long, and would enable us to achieve our twin objectives of making sure that our national security agencies are working effectively to keep Canadians safe and that Canadians' rights and freedoms are protected. As members know, Bill C-22 would create a committee of parliamentarians with extraordinary access to classified information so they can closely examine intelligence and security operations.

This new Canadian committee would have a broader mandate and greater access to information than many of its international counterparts. The bill before us would allow the committee to review legislation, policy, regulation, administration, and financing related to national security and intelligence along with any related activity a department undertakes. By comparison, in Australia the equivalent committee can only conduct statutory reviews of legislation and review the expenditure and administration of their agencies requiring ministerial referral to look at any of the additional issues. In the United Kingdom, the committee requires a memorandum of understanding with the prime minister to look at anything beyond the work of three specific British agencies.

Therefore, from the start, Bill C-22 would provide the committee with a wider-ranging scope than those of some of our major international allies with similar Westminster-style systems. That was the case when the bill was first introduced, and the public safety committee has made amendments intended to move the Canadian version even further beyond the authorities and access that exist among our allies. I certainly applaud that objective and I agree with some of the amendments brought forward. Others, however, are problematic and I will explain which of the committee's amendments I would like to preserve and why.

As is the case with other similar national security committees in parliaments around the world, one of the key concerns is how to ensure that the committee has access to the information it needs to do its job, while ensuring that security is not compromised by the release of especially sensitive information. That is why the original bill listed certain types of information that would be exempt from the committee's purview and give ministers the authority to determine that certain information could not be divulged to the committee for national security reasons.

I support changes made by committee members that would expand the mandates of the new national security committee, notably by requiring ministers to give reasons for withholding information on national security grounds and to notify the committee when those grounds no longer apply. I also support the change that would only allow the chair of the committee a vote in the case of a tie. I support the requirement that public versions of committee reports must clearly indicate the extent and reasons for any redactions. I support the new whistle-blower clause added by the NDP. I also support changes to clause 14, which would give the committee access to information about ongoing defence intelligence activities in support of military operations, privileged information under the Investment Canada Act, and information collected by FINTRAC, the Financial Transactions and Reports Analysis Centre of Canada.

There are, however, certain exemptions to the information the committee would have access to that I would like to see added back into the bill. These concern information about people in the witness protection program, the identities of confidential sources, as well as information directly related to ongoing police investigations.

● (1040)

In the first two cases, there is the potential for individuals to be placed in serious danger if their identities become known, and there is no reason that the committee would need to know who exactly these people are in order to properly scrutinize any intelligence activities. As concerns ongoing police investigations, it is important to guard against even the perception of political interference in active investigations and prosecutions. Once an investigation is no longer active, the committee would certainly review it retrospectively.

I would also like to see clause 16 reintroduced. This part authorizes a minister to prevent a disclosure of special operating information as defined by the Security of Information Act when it could be injurious to national security. In such cases, the minister would have to give reasons in writing, and the fact that this discretion was used would be public. This is comparable to the way equivalent committees operate in the U.K., Australia, and New Zealand.

Indeed, our proposed approach to access the information follows the best practices established in other allied countries. In both Australia and the U.K., for example, a minister may prevent the disclosure of operationally sensitive information to the committee if it is deemed that disclosure would not be in the interests of national security. Nevertheless, the Canadian committee would have expansive access to information and the powers necessary to ensure that our security framework is strong and effective, and that Canadians' rights and freedoms are well protected.

The committee would be well resourced and supported to do its job as a fully independent body setting its own agenda. This would strengthen democratic accountability. It would ensure that national security and intelligence activities are being carried out in an effective way that respects the values we cherish as Canadians.

It would indeed set a higher bar for accountability to Parliament than many of our international allies. It would fulfill an important promise that we made to Canadians during the campaign.

I urge all members to support this legislation, Bill C-22, and some of the amendments.

Mr. David de Burgh Graham (Laurentides—Labelle, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, in an era when the Five Eyes have been accused of doing things like the Stuxnet worm and creating the Equation Group, which created hacks for hard drives, and otherwise doing things which are varying levels of creative, I am wondering what my colleague from Coast of Bays—Central—Notre Dame thinks of the importance of having a committee of this type to oversee and make sure that whenever these kinds of actions are taken by any member of the Five Eyes, those actions are legal and ethical and are kept within the bounds of what we should and can be doing.

Mr. Scott Simms: Mr. Speaker, I remember that we debated and discussed this some time ago, even in the last Parliament under the guise of private members' bills, several of those pieces of legislation, and how to keep track with the Five Eyes, in particular, the U.K., New Zealand, and Australia. We talked about how we wanted to create this committee of parliamentarians, not a parliamentary committee which has been pointed out several times today. It is a natural extension of oversight from civilian bodies such as our own that was necessary. There are parliamentarians who are far more eloquent in their explanation of this than I am, but nevertheless, I certainly believe in their enthusiasm. I certainly believe this is long overdue, as was pointed out by many in the House, and not just from this party.

● (1045)

Mr. Todd Doherty (Cariboo—Prince George, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have had the pleasure of working with our hon. colleague on the fisheries and oceans committee. I think our fisheries and oceans committee has been doing some great work. It consists of members of Parliament who bring a variety of skill sets, experience, and knowledge of the issues at hand, which has allowed us to do some incredible work, in terms of the Fisheries Act review, the northern cod study, our Atlantic salmon study, because we bring real-world experience to the committee. We have met with the minister, who has advised us they are going to take our recommendations forward.

However, with the national security and intelligence committee, the government, again, is essentially just fulfilling a campaign promise. It is ticking off that check box saying it is doing it. but then the revisions it has made in the most recent iteration of the bill are really not giving any form of authority or power to any of the committee members. As a matter of fact, it is weakening it. The government members are standing before the House, and before Canadians who are in the gallery and who are tuning in, and saying that this is going to be better than any other of our four ally nations and partners. The reality is that this is a shell game.

My hon. colleague has mentioned some things that he would like to see, but I guess the question I would ask him is, does he not recognize that the government has weakened the original intent of this committee with these recommendations?

Mr. Scott Simms: Mr. Speaker, the answer to his question is probably within his question. I appreciate his comments about the fisheries committee, incidentally. He mentioned that the powers contained within this legislation are more broad and more powerful than other allies', upon which they were modelled. Therein, I think, lies the answer to his question. It is not a shell game. Take some of the amendments that we have taken from committee that were pointed out to us, some of the automatic stuff, like subpoenas or the witness protection program, which is a fine example. The information, the narrative is laid out, it is just that some of the information is not disclosed, for reasons that are quite obvious. We talked about this before the last Parliament, and even before the campaign. We talked about the essential nature of this. This is why I brought some of this forward. I want to re-establish some of the things that were taken out in committee because I think they are absolutely necessary. We have listened to some of them and we have left them out. However, in particular cases, like the witness protection program I talked about earlier, they are an essential part. I think in the spirit of this, as was pointed out before, this is long overdue, and we have done it, and we are far more thorough than other nations.

Mr. Daniel Blaikie (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise to speak to report stage of Bill C-22 today. The NDP was supportive of this bill at second reading because we are supportive of the idea that we need stronger oversight when it comes to our national security and intelligence agencies. We were optimistic that if the bill were to proceed to committee, we could work out details at committee that would make that oversight body of parliamentarians an effective means of oversight.

Our optimism was rewarded at committee. There was some good work done there. There was collaboration across party lines, which is really important to underline because part of the point of this committee of parliamentarians is to have that kind of co-operation across party lines. When it comes to issues of national security it is important not to make them partisan issues. Therefore, up to this point, the committee model for the legislation was working well as a model for the committee of parliamentarians. The kind of inter-party co-operation we would hope to see on that committee, once established, was actually taking place at the committee level.

It was not just committee members pulling ideas out of a hat and all agreeing on it; there were experts who testified at the committee and made suggestions as to how to make it better in the sense of ensuring that it would be effective. We can establish a committee of parliamentarians who can meet in secret, but if the government is controlling all of the information the committee gets, and if it does not have the power to subpoena witnesses and get that information that it deems is necessary for adequate oversight, and if government is able to control the release of its findings, rather than leaving it to its good judgment, then it is a horse and pony show. It is not really about providing meaningful oversight for our national security agencies, it is more about government placating Canadians, and having something it can point to that says, “We did something that really makes no difference operationally speaking for those security and intelligence agencies.” The committee was doing that. It was not just New Democrats and the Conservatives calling for those changes at committee; the Liberals on the committee were calling for those changes also. In fact, they made those changes.

The committee heard from experts. The experts gave good advice on how to make this a meaningful oversight committee. Amendments were passed in order to effect those changes. Then, when it came back to the House, the government presented a number of amendments, which we are debating now, to vitiate the substance of a lot of those amendments. That was disappointing because it means that if these amendments pass, structurally the committee would not be the kind of effective oversight body that Canadians and the committee members were looking forward to, including the Liberals on the committee. It is a disappointment in that sense, but it is also a disappointment, and I think foreshadows a legitimate concern for us and for Canadians, that the government is not taking a sincere and authentic approach to having this committee provide independent oversight. Here we had inter-party co-operation and it did not produce what the government wanted. We have seen this before. We saw it at the Special Committee on Electoral Reform, where again we had a lot of fanfare from the government about how it was going to do something totally different. This was precedent-setting. It was agreeing to the NDP's idea for a committee. It was even going to see it have a majority on that committee. Then, when the committee came up with something it did not like or did not already agree with, it said, "Forget it. We're not really serious about that."

The substance of the government's amendments to the all-party work that was done at committee in order to make this a better bill foreshadows that same attitude on the part of the government. If it has that attitude toward the committee that did the work to create an effective oversight body, then I think it is reasonable for Canadians to expect that this is the attitude it will have toward the work of the committee itself. I think it is fair for Canadians to say, "Why bother with an independent oversight committee", when the government is essentially giving itself a clear path to control the information that the committee would see, in other words, to make sure that, if there are things that would impugn the government, that independent oversight committee would not see that information, because the committee itself would not have the power to compel testimony and to get information for itself.

● (1050)

If the government is going to control it at that level, and it already have a history of ignoring the advice of committees that it initially said were going to be a great thing and were going to come up with something and were going to be an example of inter-party collaboration, then I do not think Canadians have cause to be optimistic that this committee would produce the results that everyone was so hopeful for. That is too bad. It is shameful in fact, and frustrating, particularly from a government that said it was going to respect the role of committees.

In the context of Wednesday night's vote on the genetic discrimination bill, the government had better start getting wise. It talks a good game about respecting the role of committees and the independence of parliamentarians, but it has actually been very heavy-handed in the way it treats committees and in the way it treats its backbenchers, at least in name. Instead of listening to its backbenchers up front to develop better policy, and instead of listening to its Liberals on committee who vote for good changes, it says it is not going to do it that way.

If it had listened to it backbench on the genetic discrimination bill it would have avoided an embarrassment. Essentially, Liberal backbenchers said they did not trust the Prime Minister's judgment when it comes to constitutional issues, because the Prime Minister came out and said he did not think the changes to the law were constitutional. The Liberal backbench disagreed. That is fine. That is their right.

All I am saying is it would be a better government and more consistent with what the Prime Minister has said if it had just listened to its members up front and listened to committees up front. If it had listened to the committee, and instead of taking out the committee amendments had gone ahead with them, we would have the gold standard in independent parliamentary review of security and intelligence agencies. It is because of the Liberal backbench, with no thanks to the government, that we are going to have a decent law on genetic discrimination in Canada. That is a good thing. Why the government feels it cannot do that as a matter of course, I do not understand. Perhaps some Liberals will want to shed light on that later.

There is a problem with the substance of these amendments in terms of what they do to the committee and its capacity for independent oversight. There are clearly problems with the process in terms of the government's attitude toward the work of its own members on committee, as well as the opposition. There is no better reason to oppose something when it is wrong on the substance of the matter and it is wrong with respect to the process. If it did not get the process right and it did not get the substance right, it is beyond me why members of the House would see fit to support these amendments.

The committee, if it were established, would simply be the first step, because there are other questions that play out in a number of different ways about how we provide effective ongoing oversight of our security agencies. Presumably, we want a committee that is going to have the information it needs in order to provide advice to government on whether we should have a super agency, for instance, that would supervise all of our security and intelligence agencies, or the current model, where we have a number of review bodies that specialize in the specific tasks and roles of particular security agencies, whether CSIS, CSE, or the RCMP. However, we need to give the committee a better mandate to collaborate more effectively, to make sure there are not any pockets where security and intelligence work is being done where there is no oversight.

We need a committee of parliamentarians who can provide good advice on that. However, we are not going to get it if that committee does not have the independence it needs. Also, if it does not have independence with respect to the information it receives, it does not have real independence as an oversight committee. That is why this change to the committee's ability to subpoena witnesses, and with respect to the minister's right to make judgments about what information the committee would receive, is so important.

It is for all those reasons, reasons of substance and process, that I am not prepared to support these amendments. It is for those reasons that if the amendments pass I will not be prepared to support the bill going forward.

● (1055)

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member for Elmwood—Transcona will have five minutes for questions and comments when the House next returns to debate on the question. Now we will go to statements by members.

The hon. member for Mississauga—Lakeshore.

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

[*English*]

ADVOCATE FOR PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES

Mr. Sven Spengemann (Mississauga—Lakeshore, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is my pleasure to recognize Rabia Khedr, recently appointed to the Ontario Human Rights Commission for her inspiring work in my community.

Commissioner Khedr has long been a staunch advocate for persons with disabilities. She is the founder of the Canadian Association of Muslims with Disabilities and currently is the president and CEO of Deen Support Services. Through her hard work and dedication, Deen runs the Muneeba Centre in my riding, and I was honoured to attend its grand opening last year.

Many adults with developmental disabilities find themselves with nowhere to go and nothing to do after finishing school. As a result, they face significant deficiencies in their quality of life. The Muneeba Centre fills this gap by offering life skills, day programming, peer support groups, information sessions, and respite and residential services for individuals living with disabilities and their families and caregivers in a culturally and spiritually safe environment.

I invite all members to recognize Rabia Khedr for her inspirational efforts to build a more inclusive society.

* * *

● (1100)

NUCLEAR HAZARDOUS WASTE

Mr. Dean Allison (Niagara West, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to share the concerns of some of my constituents regarding shipments of nuclear waste that could soon pass through the Niagara region. This material, from the Canadian Nuclear Laboratories facility in Chalk River, is being returned to the United States for processing.

Many Niagara residents have organized themselves to scrutinize the planning and approval process for these shipments to ensure that every precaution is taken. It is essential that this nuclear waste be transported in a way that fully protects the people along its path, and of course, the surrounding environment.

I call upon all levels of government and the Canadian Nuclear Safety Commission to work with their counterparts in the United States to ensure that these shipments are completed safely and securely. If this project fails to meet the very highest standards for transporting nuclear hazardous waste, it should not be allowed to pass through Niagara.

SPECIAL OLYMPICS

Mr. Robert Morrissey (Egmont, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to wish the best of luck to Janet Charchuk, a young woman in my riding who will be representing Canada at the 2017 Special Olympics World Winter Games.

Janet has Down's syndrome but says that while it is a part of her, it does not define her as a person. A strong advocate for people with disabilities, she is the president of PEI People First and is a provincial representative on the People First of Canada board of directors. She also represented Special Olympics team PEl at last year's national games, where she won three medals in snowshoeing events.

This week, Janet's hometown of Alberton organized a special community event to wish her well before she travels to Austria next week to again compete in snowshoeing.

Janet is a role model. I wish her and all team Canada competitors the best of luck.

* * *

FIRST THINGS FIRST

Mr. Richard Cannings (South Okanagan—West Kootenay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, five years ago, Penticton resident Fred Ritchie became concerned about the issue of climate change. He called a few friends, and half a dozen of us ended up sitting around his table. Before the meeting was over, we had formed an informal group that we called First Things First, because climate change was clearly the problem the world had to solve before anything else.

I have not been directly involved with the group for the last couple of years, but clearly, it is thriving. Last year, First Things First put on a one-day solar fair and more than 600 people showed up.

On April 22, the group is putting on a forum at the Penticton Secondary School called "Energy: Our Present, Our Future". Renewable energy systems, sustainable buildings, and the new energy workforce are among dozens of topics in this daylong symposium.

I will be there, continuing to learn how our society can create jobs and wealth while making the transition to a low-carbon future.

* * *

[*Translation*]

COQUITLAM—PORT COQUITLAM SENIORS ADVISORY COUNCIL

Mr. Ron McKinnon (Coquitlam—Port Coquitlam, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am proud to announce that the Coquitlam—Port Coquitlam seniors advisory council held its first meeting last week.

[*English*]

The seniors advisory council will meet regularly. Its members are from different backgrounds, neighbourhoods, and associations.

Our government has worked hard to meet the needs of seniors. We have restored the eligibility age for OAS and GIS and increased GIS for almost one million single seniors. After a lifetime of hard work and contributions, Canadian seniors deserve a dignified and comfortable retirement.

Members of my seniors advisory council provided me with their top three priorities: housing, health care, and pensions. We are meeting again in April. What I learn from seniors on my council I will bring right back to Ottawa to ensure that our seniors have a strong voice on the Hill.

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ELMIRA MAPLE SYRUP FESTIVAL

Mr. Harold Albrecht (Kitchener—Conestoga, CPC): Mr. Speaker, spring is in the air, and having already attended the official maple tree tapping two weeks ago, this spring air smells of sweet maple syrup.

On April 1, I will once again have the privilege of serving at the Elmira Maple Syrup Festival. This is the world's largest one-day festival. Thousands of pancakes flooded with fresh maple syrup is something people do not want to miss.

Mr. Speaker, if you will join me personally in Kitchener—Conestoga on April 1, I will be happy to serve you and any one of my colleagues joining me in Elmira. Not only is the festival filled with good food, sugar bush tours, pancake-flipping contests, and many other activities for all ages, but last year over $51,000 was raised in support of local charities and not-for-profit organizations.

I encourage all my constituents to get involved and join me in volunteering for the 53rd Elmira Maple Syrup Festival. On April 1, come to the greatest riding in all of Canada, Kitchener—Conestoga, and taste the tradition.

* * *

● (1105)

TEAM EAGLE

Ms. Kim Rudd (Northumberland—Peterborough South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to acknowledge a company in my riding at the epicentre of the rural renaissance that is going on in eastern Ontario. Team Eagle Ltd. is a global leader in the advancement of airfield innovations, from cutting-edge airfield operations software to anti-fire and de-icing equipment, to so much more in between. Team Eagle has also developed the world's largest snow remover for airports. It will revolutionize how airfield snow removal is done.

Team Eagle's new braking availability tester provides accurate information on runway surface conditions contaminated by ice, snow, or slush so that pilots can better calculate an aircraft's stopping capability on touchdown and avoid overruns that can be costly and sometimes fatal. This exciting innovation is being tested by Transport Canada. This is all being done in my riding of Northumberland—Peterborough South in a facility in a community of fewer than 4,000 people.

I look forward to sharing more eastern Ontario success stories in the near future.

[*Translation*]

WORLD SOCIAL WORK DAY

Hon. Ginette Petitpas Taylor (Moncton—Riverview—Dieppe, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, World Social Work Day is an opportunity for the community of social workers to further educate their peers and to strengthen the resolve of social workers in order to advance social justice issues at the local, provincial, and international level.

As a former social worker involved in helping victims and their families, I am delighted to draw attention to this noble profession.

[*English*]

Every day, social workers make important contributions to society by addressing problems that are global in scope and that require complex responses from all levels of government. At its core, the profession focuses on strengthening communities so that the people within them can form strong social networks that enable improved health outcomes and more satisfying lives.

[*Translation*]

To conclude, protecting and upholding human rights and social justice are the fundamental objectives of social work. Let us take this opportunity to recognize the important work of social workers in Canada and around the world.

* * *

[*English*]

HOLI

Mr. Bob Saroya (Markham—Unionville, CPC): Mr. Speaker, happy Holi. Holi is the Hindu festival of colours and a celebration of spring that occurs on the last full moon of winter. Originating in India and Nepal, Holi is now celebrated throughout the world. Holi's message of peace and compassion brings together people from many different communities. This centuries-old agricultural festival bids farewell to the winter season and welcomes the season of rebirth that is spring. It is a time of personal reflection and forgiveness.

As Canadians, we admire the contributions Hindus have made to our country. As the member of Parliament for Markham—Unionville, I wish all Canadians celebrating Holi a joyous festival.

Holi *Mubarak*. Happy Phagwa. Happy Holi.

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FREDERICTION CONSTITUENCY YOUTH COUNCIL

Mr. Matt DeCourcey (Fredericton, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Fredericton is full of educated, engaged, and entrepreneurial youth who care deeply about the social, economic, and environmental progress of Canada. The 18 members of the Fredericton Constituency Youth Council best exemplify this desire to build a more inclusive and prosperous country for all.

[*Translation*]

The Youth Council's three working groups work closely with local leaders and stakeholders and conduct in-depth research in three areas vital to the advancement of our country.

[*English*]

I look forward, in April, to receiving their recommendations on how best to address youth homelessness in Canada, how to enhance economic and social inclusion for newcomer refugees, and how to increase access to mental health supports for vulnerable youth, including those within the LGBTQ2 community.

[*Translation*]

My government colleagues can expect some solid and well-thought-out recommendations from these young leaders, and I am looking forward to the debate in this House after we receive these recommendations.

* * *

[*English*]

CITY OF TORONTO REFUGEES

Mr. Adam Vaughan (Spadina—Fort York, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Toronto has long been a sanctuary city. In 1847, the city had a population of only 20,000 people, but in that same year, across the ocean, Ireland was gripped by famine. The Great Hunger, as it is known, killed millions and sent millions more abroad in search of not just a better life, but in fact of life itself. In just one summer, Toronto more than doubled in size, as 38,000 desperate souls arrived in the city without notice.

On the shores of Lake Ontario, despair was not met by fear but by compassion. Refugees were brought to the city. A public health system sprung to life almost overnight, and even though we had few doctors and nurses, many gave their lives in the service of trying to save these refugees, so that they could live their lives and prosper in Ontario. This extraordinary response is now memorialized along the shores of Lake Ontario by Island Park. This fall, a second park will be opened in Toronto to memorialize the health workers who gave their lives.

This St. Patrick's Day, be sure to raise a glass, but also remember the brave and compassionate response of Toronto to refugees.

* * *

● (1110)

BENEFITS FOR VETERANS

Mr. Dan Albas (Central Okanagan—Similkameen—Nicola, CPC): Mr. Speaker, recently a veteran by the name of of Richard Clements, of Summerland, British Columbia, came by my office and asked if I might share a few words on his behalf.

Dick will be turning 90 this year, and he wanted to publicly thank Veterans Affairs and the great staff there who have helped him over the years. Dick also asked that I pass on his thanks for programs like the Canada pension plan, old age security, and guaranteed income supplement. He made a special mention of the assistance that the war veterans allowance has provided for him, as well as the veterans independence program. Of course, Mr. Clements passed on a special thanks to the many Canadian Legions across Canada for the important work that they do.

Mr. Clements is a vibrant and healthy 90-year-old veteran, and he credits many of these programs and organizations for what he call his "healthy and aging success".

On a personal note, sometimes in this place, we get consumed with those things that go wrong. It can be overlooked that successive generations of parliamentarians have debated and passed many of these programs that indeed are making a positive influence on people's lives.

I ask the House to join me in thanking Richard Clements for his service to our great country.

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VIMY RIDGE

Mr. Omar Alghabra (Mississauga Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Vimy Ridge was a defining moment in Canada's 150 year history. I would like to share a touching story about a constituent of mine in Mississauga Centre and his connection to Vimy.

This April, Charles Geen will be travelling to France to attend the 100th anniversary ceremony at Vimy Ridge. Six members of Charles's family served in World War I; three were soldiers, and the other three were nurses. One of his grandfather's cousins, Lieutenant David Forneri, was killed at Vimy on March 1, 1917. His body was never found, thus his name is engraved on the majestic Vimy Memorial.

I want to wish Charles a fantastic trip and offer my gratitude to him and his family for their service. His father, John Geen, and the rest of us, are looking forward to seeing pictures from his special trip.

As we celebrate the success of Canada, we must never forget the lessons of the past.

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INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY

Mr. Daniel Blaikie (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to pay tribute to this year's International Women's Day.

I have been blessed with a number of strong female role models in my life: my mother, Brenda; my three sisters, Rebecca, Jessica, and Tessa; my wife, Janelle; as well as many female friends and colleagues throughout the years in my work in the community sector and the NDP.

In my brief time on the Hill, the amazing women in our caucus have already helped me to be a better MP, and I look forward to continuing to learn from their examples. This week, I had the honour of sharing my seat with an inspiring young woman from Elmwood—Transcona, Shania Pruden. She did us proud by speaking with earnest passion to the struggles faced by young indigenous women in Canada.

It boggles my mind that these founts of talent, these role models, these leaders, can all expect to get paid 15% to 20% less for the work they do simply because they are women.

I say to the government: Do not wait. Bring in fair pay equity legislation now.

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RESIDENTS OF SOUTHERN MANITOBA

Mr. Larry Maguire (Brandon—Souris, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this week on the prairies, March came in like a lion, with a blizzard that dumped heaps of snow and was accompanied with 90-kilometre winds. Once again, Westman residents stepped up to the plate and helped those in need. They are truly the unsung heroes of this ordeal.

I have heard remarkable stories about people who ventured into the blizzard to rescue those who were stranded in their cars, like the young couple from New Jersey who were saved by a Souris farmer who drove his tractor to reach them, or the tireless efforts of the volunteer firefighters in the RM of Whitehead who helped those trapped on Highway 1 and set up the emergency shelter in Alexander to provide food and a place to warm up.

I thank each and every one of those volunteers who opened their homes to strangers, to those who cleaned up the roads and highways, to the municipal staff, the RCMP, and the other first responders for all of their efforts.

Through floods, blizzards, and tragedies, Manitobans always rise to the occasion.

I thank them once again.

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● (1115)

CANADIAN AGRICULTURAL SAFETY WEEK

Mrs. Karen McCrimmon (Kanata—Carleton, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, next week is Canadian Agricultural Safety Week in Canada.

My riding of Kanata—Carleton includes the fantastic farmers of West Carleton, from Panmure to Kinburn to Carp to Fitzroy Harbour. Unlike other occupations, a lot of farms are family-run operations, when the home becomes an industrial work site.

Canadian Agricultural Safety Week is an annual public awareness campaign focused on the importance of maintaining safe farming practices. I encourage everyone to check out the agricultural safety website for great information. It is designed to help farmers adopt sound safety practices.

We owe an enormous debt of gratitude to our hard-working farmers. Their work is critical to our survival and prosperity, and doing it safely is fundamental.

I want to say a special thanks to all the farmers of West Carleton. As I have said on a number of occasions, if we like to eat, we should thank a farmer.

ORAL QUESTIONS

[*English*]

TAXATION

Hon. Candice Bergen (Portage—Lisgar, CPC): Mr. Speaker, yesterday the Prime Minister criticized a possible new U.S. border tax, saying that he is concerned with anything that creates impediments at the border. In his words, extra tariffs are new taxes.

However, it is actually this Prime Minister who is putting a new tax on all Canadians in the form of a carbon tax, which will do more to hamstring Canadian trade and competitiveness than any American border tax. Just ask Alberta and Ontario.

When will the Prime Minister realize that it is his carbon tax that Canadian job creators are so worried about?

Mr. Jonathan Wilkinson (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Environment and Climate Change, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this government is committed to creating a more innovative economy that reduces emissions, protects the environment, and creates good-paying middle-class jobs.

Pricing carbon pollution will reduce emissions and provide certainty and predictability to businesses. Pricing pollution will drive innovation and clean growth. It will boost the economy and make Canada more competitive in the global market.

After 10 years of inaction on the part of the previous government, this government is taking action to address climate change, and to do so in a manner that will create good middle-class jobs.

* * *

SENIORS

Hon. Candice Bergen (Portage—Lisgar, CPC): Mr. Speaker, if that were accurate, the Liberals would release the numbers.

Canadians are worried about the Prime Minister's plan to impose a carbon tax, while refusing to say just how much this tax will cost them. The Prime Minister is not being transparent on the carbon tax, and now he will not tell Canadians how much they are going to have to pay for his out-of-control spending.

Canadians are worried that he is hiding his real agenda. Will the Liberals tell Canadians today whether they are planning on axing income splitting for seniors in this upcoming budget?

Hon. Ginette Petitpas Taylor (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, our government has made a commitment to helping seniors within this country. It is our government that reversed the age of retirement from 67 to 65.

We have also put in place an increase in the guaranteed income supplement for low-income seniors, and we have made an increase of 10%. That is substantial for seniors, because it is, on average, $1,000 more a month.

Our government is committed to helping seniors, and we are going to continue to do so.

TAXATION

Hon. Candice Bergen (Portage—Lisgar, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it was a simple yes or no question that the Liberals refuse to answer.

This reckless tax-and-spend Prime Minister will deliver a budget that will leave us with a maxed-out credit card, decades of deficit, and a huge debt that can only be financed through higher taxes.

We all know that budgets actually do not balance themselves. Canadians need to know, does the Prime Minister believe that the budget should be balanced? If so, when does he plan to do it?

Hon. Ginette Petitpas Taylor (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, once again I am pleased to rise in this House today to talk about the work that our government is doing. We are going to continue to do smart investments with our economy, to help our middle-class Canadians, and to help our economy prosper.

Good news: the job numbers are out today. We have seen over the past six months that over 220,000 jobs have been created. New jobs. Furthermore, most of those jobs are full time, so we can see that is evidence that our plan is working. We are going to continue to make the needed investments in budget 2017.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Gérard Deltell (Louis-Saint-Laurent, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Liberal member forgot to mention that 80% of those jobs are part time, whereas when we formed the government 80% of the jobs were full time. That is what it means to create wealth and jobs.

The fact of the matter is that the next budget will be tabled on March 22, which is just around the corner. Canadians are concerned, and rightly so. Let us remember what the Liberals said. They said that they would run small deficits, but now they are running astronomical deficits. They said that they would lower taxes for Canadians, but the opposite is true. They also said that they would help small-business owners, but they have done exactly the opposite by imposing additional tax burdens on them.

Why would Canadians trust the Liberals?

● (1120)

Hon. Ginette Petitpas Taylor (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to once again rise in the House today to speak about the wonderful things that our government is doing.

Once again, we are going to keep investing in the economy to help the middle class and those in need. Here is some good news. According to the numbers that came out today, over 220,000 new jobs were created in Canada over the past six months. What is more, most of these jobs are full-time jobs. That is the best job growth our country has seen in the past 10 years.

Mr. Gérard Deltell (Louis-Saint-Laurent, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am happy to talk facts and figures, no problem.

For 10 weeks, the Minister of Finance sat on a report by his own officials. It said that, if the government does not change course, the national debt will reach $1.5 trillion in 2050 and the budget will not be balanced until 2055, which is 36 years later than the Liberals projected.

Why would Canadians trust people who hide such important information?

Hon. Ginette Petitpas Taylor (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to rise in the House to tell Canadians that our plan is working.

Today we saw that our 16 months of work paid off with the creation of 220,000 new jobs in Canada, almost all of them full-time.

Anyone can see that our plan is working. We will continue to make the necessary investments in budget 2017.

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CANADA — U.S. RELATIONS

Ms. Hélène Laverdière (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, when we were questioning the government yesterday about Canadians being turned away at the border, we were told that these persons should communicate with American authorities. In other words, the government is washing its hands of the issue, which is completely unacceptable. Instead, it should take a stand and work to guarantee the rights of Canadian citizens.

Can the minister confirm that he will discuss specific cases of Canadians turned away at the border without a valid reason with his American counterpart, and ensure that there will be no further impact on Canadians who want to visit the United States?

[*English*]

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the fact of the matter is there are over 400,000 people who move back and forth across the Canada–U.S. border every single day. This is the largest, most successful border relationship in the history of the world. We work every day to ensure that Canadians will continue to enjoy the benefits of that enormous relationship, where they will be respected and treated in the manner that any Canadian citizen has a right to expect.

Mr. Daniel Blaikie (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, recently 19 individuals crossed the border into Manitoba during a blizzard, including a pregnant woman and a toddler. The Liberal government continues to claim that the current situation is somehow the status quo, but I can say that people running across farmers' fields across the border in a blizzard is not the status quo. To make matters worse, the Prime Minister has not even answered the Premier of Manitoba's letter asking for help. During the meeting today with President Trump's official, would the Liberals point out that the U.S. no longer fits Canada's own description of a safe country for refugees?

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, in fact, with respect to the asylum system in our country and in the United States, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, which is the authority in the world on this topic, has said that the safe third country arrangement is fully valid and without reason to change. In terms of dealing with the border crossings that are happening irregularly at places like Emerson and Lacolle, both the CBSA and the RCMP have made the appropriate arrangements to ensure that they can protect the health and safety of Canadians and the asylum seekers.

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GOVERNMENT ACCOUNTABILITY

Mr. Daniel Blaikie (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): There we have it, Mr. Speaker, Liberal ministers getting up and saying it is status quo; every one of them except for the finance minister, who is hinting that Trump's presidency is changing everything including the budget. Therefore, instead of flowing the funds for their promises on mental health and home care, the Liberals have cynically been using that money to force provinces onto the Harper plan. As Liberal promises collapse left and right, Canadians are wondering if they will ever get the things they really need, like a national pharmacare plan.

Is the Liberal government going to take responsibility for backtracking on its promises, or is it just going to blame it on Trump?

● (1125)

Hon. Jane Philpott (Minister of Health, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, how wonderful to have an opportunity to announce today in this House that we have in fact come to a new agreement with three additional provinces: Alberta, Ontario, *et la province de Québec*.

[*Translation*]

I am very pleased, because this is excellent news for the three provinces. We are going to improve health care and we going to support the provinces to ensure that Canadians have access to the health care they need.

* * *

TAXATION

Ms. Hélène Laverdière (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, we could do even more if the government would finally get tough on tax evasion.

By voting in favour of the NDP motion this week, the government committed to close tax loopholes that benefit wealthy taxpayers. This includes tax loopholes involving stock options, which the Liberals promised to eliminate in the election campaign.

Will the government commit to closing those tax loopholes in the upcoming budget?

[*English*]

Ms. Kamal Khera (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Revenue, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, CRA continues to take important steps in ensuring that we make progress in cracking down on tax cheats and ensuring a tax system that is more responsive and fair for all Canadians. Supported by the investment made in budget 2016, we made a significant investment of $444 million. Because of the investment we made, we now have more people, more technology, and more resources at our disposal. Because of these resources the agency audit activities have put in place to raise assessments of over $13 billion this fiscal year alone. This is what Canadians expect us to do—

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member for Haldimand—Norfolk.

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AEROSPACE INDUSTRY

Hon. Diane Finley (Haldimand—Norfolk, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Swedish authorities have just arrested a Bombardier employee who has been accused of aggravated bribery. Before handing over taxpayer dollars to Bombardier, I hope that the Liberal government did its homework and checked out all of Bombardier's operations as $375 million is a lot of money and this money does not belong to the Liberals, it belongs to Canadians.

My question is simple: Did the Canadian government have any knowledge of this Swedish investigation when it was giving Bombardier the money, yes or no?

Hon. Navdeep Bains (Minister of Innovation, Science and Economic Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as the member opposite knows, this investment that we made was for the aerospace sector, a critical sector in the Canadian economy that contributes over $28 billion to our overall growth, that contributes 211,000 jobs to our economy. This investment was critical and that is why when we made this investment we did do our due diligence in advance of entering into an agreement with Bombardier.

I am aware of the situation regarding Bombardier in Sweden. Any questions related to specific activities of the company should be directed to the company, but we did do our due diligence.

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TAXATION

Hon. Diane Finley (Haldimand—Norfolk, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I will take that as a yes.

Now the Liberals claimed that they would spend $8 billion on infrastructure, but yesterday, the parliamentary budget officer said that they are short a whopping $2.5 billion in that promised spending. Given that the Minister of Finance enjoys increasing taxes and spending Canadians' hard-earned money, I ask the finance minister, what taxes will he be raising or introducing to vacuum even more money from Canadians to pay for this shortfall?

Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos (Minister of Families, Children and Social Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Canadians have elected a government that is committed to grow the economy in order to grow the middle class. We are delighted to hear today that 220,000 new jobs have been created in the last six months, most of them full-time. This is the best record in over a decade. We are very proud of that. We look forward to continuing our agenda to grow the economy and the middle class in the next budget.

[*Translation*]

FINANCE

Mr. Joël Godin (Portneuf—Jacques-Cartier, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this government made a lot of promises that it has not kept. It keeps saying that it has helped nine out of 10 families and talks about 300,000 children. Out of a population of 36 million Canadians, that is not a big proportion. Experts all agree that the vast majority of Canadians have less money in their pockets. The Liberals have no vision and they are trying to blind us with flash shots of Mr. Selfie. Spending blindly with nothing to show for it is irresponsible.

When will this Liberal government finally be responsible and table a real budget to protect the future of our children and grandchildren?

Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos (Minister of Families, Children and Social Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to take this question because not only is the Canada child benefit lifting 300,000 children out of poverty across the country, but also, in my colleague's riding, families of 22,000 children are now getting a $200 tax-free benefit every month, which is more than they were getting under the previous system.

* * *

● (1130)

[*English*]

INFRASTRUCTURE

Mr. Matt Jeneroux (Edmonton Riverbend, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the budget will not be balanced for 38 years. How is that helping our kids? The economic situation in Alberta continues to be critical. Unemployment numbers have been climbing, businesses are crippled by new taxes, and families are struggling. What Albertans need now are good jobs. Instead, the investing of local infrastructure projects by Alberta Municipalities Association says the Alberta NDP is using $300 million of the federal building Canada fund to pay down its skyrocketing debt.

Can the minister guarantee that not one dollar of the Canada building fund has gone to anything but infrastructure projects?

Mr. Marc Miller (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Infrastructure and Communities, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am proud to rise as part of the Liberal government that believes in Alberta and believes in Albertans. We understand the challenges facing Alberta families and will continue to deliver on our commitments to invest in infrastructure and to support economic growth and improve our communities.

Working with our provincial and municipal partners, we have 127 projects with project costs of $4.2 billion invested in Alberta and I will go into detail. That includes the Yellowhead Highway extension, $230 million. That includes the Southwest Calgary Ring Road, $500 million in federal contribution. I could on for several pages, but I only have about 30 seconds. That includes $30 million federal contribution for the Calgary Green Line and Edmonton's LRT plans.

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant (Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in their 2016 deficit budget, the Liberals promised to transfer uncommitted infrastructure funds from the previous Conservative government to municipalities through the gas tax transfer fund. When they took office in November 2015, there was $837 million left to distribute to municipalities across the country. On budget day just four months later, there was just $31 million left in the pot. One problem: no municipality has a record of the money coming to their municipality, so if no one has a record of the money, where did the money go?

Mr. Marc Miller (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Infrastructure and Communities, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, part of the reason we are delivering for Canadians and their families is the fact that we want to get $180 billion of infrastructure into the economy and to stimulate the economy.

With regard to the gas tax fund, I think there is a bit of confusion. Surely the member opposite is not suggesting that we take money and reallocate it for projects that we have already promised to deliver. Unlike the other government, we do our diligence and we announce projects when they are approved at our level. The gas tax fund does get reallocated, but not in the sums that the hon. member is suggesting. We have fulfilled that promise to transfer over to the gas tax funds the appropriate amounts allocated.

* * *

TAXATION

Mr. Glen Motz (Medicine Hat—Cardston—Warner, CPC): Mr. Speaker, thousands of volunteer firefighters across Canada, individually, give hundreds of hours each year, risking their lives in the contribution to community safety. Roughly 80% of Alberta's firefighters are volunteers and a full 97% of fire departments are volunteer-operated. There are over 450 in our province alone. That is why the Conservative government instituted a volunteer firefighter tax credit.

My question is for the finance minister, or his parliamentary secretary. Will the finance minister guarantee that this tax credit will not be cancelled in the upcoming budget?

Hon. Ginette Petitpas Taylor (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, our government has made a commitment to middle-class Canadians and those working hard to join it. The first item that we did when we formed government was to lower taxes for middle-class Canadians. We put in place the very generous Canada child benefit program for middle-class families. Also, we continue to go forward in helping families and children because we want all Canadians to prosper.

[*Translation*]

CANADA REVENUE AGENCY

Mr. Pierre-Luc Dusseault (Sherbrooke, NDP): Mr. Speaker, tax evasion and patronage scandals continue to seriously undermine the credibility of an important institution in our country. Our officials are leaving the Canada Revenue Agency to go to accounting firms that are not shy about evading taxes, firms such as KPMG, which developed a scheme with the Isle of Man. The scheme sought to help KPMG's clients avoid paying taxes in Canada. It is as simple as that.

My question is simple: is the minister committed to tightening the post-employment rules to prevent situations like this, situations that erode public trust?

[*English*]

Ms. Kamal Khera (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Revenue, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the CRA's current post-employment policy instrument is among the most stringent in Canada. Any specific disclosure of taxpayer information by either an employee or former employee is prohibited by law.

Let me be very clear. This prohibition has no time limit. An employee or former employee of CRA who violates these provisions could face sanctions, including fines or imprisonment.

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● (1135)

HEALTH

Ms. Georgina Jolibois (Desnethé—Missinippi—Churchill River, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the upcoming budget must address the tragic shortfalls in funding for mental health services. The Sask Party wants to believe everything is fine, but people in my riding face great challenges when it comes to accessing the appropriate mental health services. The federal government cannot continue to ignore the shortfall in our northern communities. People in my riding cannot afford to wait.

When will the Liberals commit to a comprehensive long-term strategy that provides adequate mental health care to northerners?

Hon. Jane Philpott (Minister of Health, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for her continued advocacy on behalf of her constituents and, indeed, all people in her province as it relates to the very real needs for mental health. She knows that we have invested in the area of mental wellness for first nations and Inuit across the country in the order of an additional $70 million that was announced earlier this year.

In addition, we reached a deal with Saskatchewan, one of now nine provinces and three territories with which we have reached an agreement on mental health funding. In Saskatchewan's case, it was $150 million that will go to support expanding access to very real mental health needs in that province.

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GOVERNMENT APPOINTMENTS

Mr. Todd Doherty (Cariboo—Prince George, CPC): Mr. Speaker, no government in recent history has taken so long to fill watchdog vacancies as these Liberals. This should not come as a surprise as the Prime Minister is under investigation for multiple ethical transgressions. Between countless judicial vacancies and unfilled watchdog positions, the Liberals have once again proved to Canadians that they are only willing to green-light Liberal insiders and former chiefs of staff. Just yesterday, they appointed a Liberal donor to the superior court of P.E.I. The Liberals have proven once again the only families they are interested in looking after are their own.

Hon. Bardish Chagger (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister of Small Business and Tourism, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the opportunity to stand in this House to remind Canadians and to remind members that it is this government that introduced a new merit-based process that is open and transparent. Every position is available online. I encourage Canadians to apply.

We have taken diversity, bilingualism, and gender parity into consideration when making these important decisions. We will continue to deliver for Canadians.

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FOREIGN INVESTMENT

Mr. Todd Doherty (Cariboo—Prince George, CPC): Mr. Speaker, what do the Liberals do when a Chinese insurance company with a secret ownership structure dominated by a who's who of the Chinese Communist Party applies to buy essential seniors care facilities in Canada? They turn over the keys to one of the largest health care providers in the province of British Columbia.

Nobody will do business with Anbang Insurance because of its questionable ownership, not even Wall Street firms. How can we trust it to look after our seniors in the most vulnerable times of their lives?

When will the Liberals finally act in the interest of Canadian seniors and put this sale on hold?

Hon. Navdeep Bains (Minister of Innovation, Science and Economic Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, our number one priority is the economy, and we realize we need to be open to trade, open to people, and open to investment. That is why we looked at this transaction and asked if it is in our overall net economic benefit, and yes it is.

We did our due diligence. We made sure that the employment levels will remain high. We will make sure that Retirement Concepts has the additional resources it needs to expand. We did our job. It is good for British Columbia, good for the economy, and good for seniors.

AIR TRANSPORTATION

Mrs. Kelly Block (Carlton Trail—Eagle Creek, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I do not believe that the Minister of Transport himself thinks that selling off our airports is good for travellers. If he has listened to any of the advice he has been receiving over the past year, he will have heard that this is a bad idea. However, as he has stated, the Minister of Finance will make that decision, and we now know he needs the billions of dollars that the sale of the airports to international investors will provide to hide the failure of Liberal budgeting. Just how desperate is the minister to hide his mess?

Mrs. Karen McCrimmon (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Transport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, our government recognizes that a strong, integrated, and modern transportation system is fundamental to Canada's continuing economic performance and competitiveness. We will also support greater choice, better service, lower costs, and new rights for middle-class Canadian travellers.

We are working hard to improve the transportation system to better serve Canadians.

● (1140)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Luc Berthold (Mégantic—L'Érable, CPC): Mr. Speaker, that answer has absolutely nothing to do with the question. Canadians are worried. The Liberal government is out of cash. The Minister of Transport refuses to say whether the government is going to sell some airports to pay the interest on the Minister of Finance's credit card.

Will the minister finally give us a straight answer? Is the government going to sell the Quebec City, Montreal, and Vancouver airports, yes or no, and more importantly, tell us who the buyers will be? Canadians have the right to know.

[*English*]

Mrs. Karen McCrimmon (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Transport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, any decision about Canada's transportation system will be in the best interests of Canadian travellers and Canadian gateways. We will make strategic investments in trade and transportation projects that build stronger, more efficient transportation corridors to international markets and help Canadian businesses to compete, grow, and create more jobs for the middle class. That is the program we are on, and we are going to continue.

* * *

THE ENVIRONMENT

Mr. Richard Cannings (South Okanagan—West Kootenay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, for 10 long years, Stephen Harper received dozens of fossil awards. To be clear, they were ironic. Now the current Prime Minister is taking it to another level.

Yesterday, a crowd of global oil and gas executives in Houston awarded the Prime Minister a true fossil award, an award for the approval of pipelines without the social licence that he said would be needed during the last election.

People would be right to be confused. Is this seriously the real change Canadians were promised?

Ms. Kim Rudd (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Natural Resources, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Canada has no stronger friend, partner, and ally than the United States. We share common values: we are pro-jobs, pro-business, and pro-North America. That is why the minister and Prime Minister are in Houston building relationships with our North American partners.

We will continue to work with our continental partners to build on our energy partnership, creating good-paying middle-class jobs and opportunities for years to come.

We have taken a smart, balanced approach to developing our energy resources by pricing carbon pollution and creating an oceans protection plan, all the while getting our resources to market, and creating more than 25,000 jobs.

Mr. Pierre Nantel (Longueuil—Saint-Hubert, NDP): How about pro-environment, Mr. Speaker?

[*Translation*]

Our Prime Minister keeps making promises and saying just about anything while courting American oil companies so they might award him some fairly dubious prizes.

How can this government even dare to claim that it wants to meet its objectives, which it committed to by signing the Paris agreement, when clearly the Minister of the Environment is being told to keep quiet?

When will this government finally be true to its word and join the G8 countries that have a strategy for the electrification of transportation?

We are not going to meet our COP21 targets with four charging stations.

[*English*]

Mr. Jonathan Wilkinson (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Environment and Climate Change, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, our government knows that growing the economy and protecting the environment go together in the modern world. I would say that we are incredibly proud of the work this government has done on the climate change and environment file since we took office. We have accomplished more in the past year than the previous government accomplished in a decade.

Our government has put in place pricing on carbon pollution. We have accelerated the phase-out of coal-fired power. We are developing a clean fuel standard to cut emissions associated with oil and gas use. We are investing in public transit and electrical vehicle infrastructure. We have taken action on short-lived climate pollutants. We have done a number of other things to ensure that we are protecting the economy while we are growing good middle-class jobs for the clean growth economy of the future.

* * *

HEALTH

Mrs. Deborah Schulte (King—Vaughan, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Canadians are proud of our publicly funded health care system. It ensures that no Canadian has to make a choice between economic well-being and his or her health.

The Minister of Health has been meeting with her provincial and territorial counterparts, reaching agreements with them on new investments on mental health and home care. As the minister has just announced, new deals have been reached with Quebec, Ontario, and Alberta. Could the minister elaborate on how this great news will benefit Canadians?

[*Translation*]

Hon. Jane Philpott (Minister of Health, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for King—Vaughan for her question.

As she said, we worked with the provinces and territories for several months and discussed ways to improve the health care system for Canadians and especially investments in mental health and home care.

[*English*]

As I just announced, today we are very happy that we have reached agreements with three additional provinces, Alberta, Ontario, and Quebec, for making new investments. In addition to increasing the Canada health transfer, every single year, we will add additional resources to these very important shared priorities.

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JUSTICE

Hon. Rob Nicholson (Niagara Falls, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we see a Hells Angels leader from Quebec, a Toronto man charged with possessing child pornography, an Ottawa father charged with breaking both of his newborn baby's ankles, and multiple people charged with murder. There are still over 60 vacancies on the superior court. How many more suspects will be set free on our streets before the government will take its job seriously and appoint the required judges to keep our streets safe?

● (1145)

Mr. Marco Mendicino (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member and I think every member of this House will join me in saying that murder and sexual assault crimes are wrong. This government is taking concrete steps to appoint judges in a very efficient manner. The hon. member will know that this is the product of a judicial appointments process, which has been renewed by this government.

We will continue to take recommendations from the judicial advisory committees that have been struck across this country. This will ensure that we have a criminal justice system that protects Canadians and will ensure that victims get the justice they deserve.

* * *

[*Translation*]

MARIJUANA

Mr. Alain Rayes (Richmond—Arthabaska, CPC): Mr. Speaker, during the consultations on the legalization of marijuana, Dr. Chris Rumball indicated that the Prime Minister's plan needed to take into account the sad incidents that have occurred in the United States, where the number of fatal accidents caused by drivers who tested positive for marijuana doubled in the state of Washington and tripled in Colorado.

I am concerned, police officers are concerned, and Canadians are concerned. Can the Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness reassure us that police officers will have the tools they need to detect whether drivers are impaired by drugs before the government legalizes marijuana?

[*English*]

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, indeed, we have made that point very clear from the very beginning of our discussions with respect to marijuana. We are obviously going to legalize cannabis and apply a very strict regulatory regime around the use of the product.

With respect to drug-impaired driving, that is already a criminal offence in Canada, and we will make sure it remains so. We will also make sure the police have the technical tools to enforce the law effectively.

Mr. Harold Albrecht (Kitchener—Conestoga, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as the Liberals push to legalize marijuana, many Canadians are concerned about the consequences of people driving while high. We have seen these issues in Colorado, where marijuana-related traffic deaths increased by 92% between 2010 and 2014.

After meetings with drug recognition experts, it is clear there is no precise way to measure impairment while under the influence of marijuana. Will the Liberals stop their drive to legalize marijuana until authorities have the tools to ensure the safety of Canadians on the road?

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I share the hon. gentleman's concern and very keen interest in this dimension of the issue. I can assure him that we are putting the steps in place to make sure the public is properly protected. This includes over the last three or four months testing scientifically a variety of different roadside testing devices in seven different locations across the country to ensure that they function properly under Canadian conditions.

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GOVERNMENT APPOINTMENTS

Mr. Bob Saroya (Markham—Unionville, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Mary Ng, the Liberal candidate in Markham—Thornhill and former director of appointments to the Prime Minister, bragged she was responsible for the appointment of members of the Immigration and Refugee Board. The Prime Minister's hand-picked candidate is undermining the confidence in the board.

Could the Prime Minister ensure that the integrity of the Immigration and Refugee Board has not been compromised as a result of Mary Ng's political ambitions?

Hon. Bardish Chagger (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister of Small Business and Tourism, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the member will be proud to know that this government has introduced a new government-wide appointments process that is open, transparent, and merit-based. Our approach will actually result in the recommendation of highly qualified candidates who achieve gender parity and truly reflect Canada's diversity. All opportunities to apply are available online, and I encourage Canadians to apply.

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[*Translation*]

FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Ms. Anne Minh-Thu Quach (Salaberry—Suroît, NDP): Mr. Speaker, last spring, Formosa caused an environmental disaster in Vietnam that killed millions of fish, a staple in the Vietnamese diet. A new wave of repression and harassment against human rights activists followed, and 110 of those people are still behind bars. My recent letters to the Minister of Foreign Affairs remain unanswered.

Will the government keep its word with regard to human rights and push for the release of these activists, including Nguyen Ngoc Nhu Quynh and Nguyen Van Dai?

● (1150)

Mr. Matt DeCourcey (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for her question.

Respect for human rights is one of the fundamental principles of our foreign policy. In all of our international relations, Canada urges its friends around the world to be sure that all of their actions reflect that human rights are a priority for them. That is what we are doing because respect for human rights is an integral part of who we are as Canadians.

* * *

[*English*]

THE ENVIRONMENT

Ms. Sheila Malcolmson (Nanaimo—Ladysmith, NDP): Mr. Speaker, international shipping interests are pushing for five huge commercial anchorages off the shores of Gabriola Island. This is causing great concern in the riding. This project has no local benefit. It threatens the community and the sensitive ecology of our coastline.

The Liberal government should not use Harper's environmental rules to assess this project. Will the transport minister reject the request for Gabriola bulk anchorages? It is bad for our local economy, bad for climate change, and there is no upside for Canada.

Mrs. Karen McCrimmon (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Transport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we are committed to delivering on a mandate, and we are putting significant money, $1.5 billion, into an oceans protection plan. We need to manage our natural resources, all of our resources, and we need to spend taxpayers' money responsibly.

In support of the Canadian transportation sector, it will be about building new markets and new gateways, providing better service to Canadians.

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INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Mr. Dean Allison (Niagara West, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the situation in South Sudan is deteriorating rapidly. An estimated 100,000 people are facing starvation, with a further one million people on the brink of famine. Over 250,000 children are already severely malnourished and at risk of death. Three UN agencies have declared it a famine in South Sudan.

What is the government prepared to do to help the people of South Sudan?

[*Translation*]

Hon. Marie-Claude Bibeau (Minister of International Development and La Francophonie, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate my colleague's interest in the terrible situation that is occurring right now in South Sudan.

In 2016, we allocated $45 million in international aid specifically for South Sudan. We are currently reviewing the various requests for humanitarian aid, particularly for the food crisis in Nigeria, Somalia, Yemen, and South Sudan. We will be in a position to contribute even more in the coming weeks.

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[*English*]

WINE INDUSTRY

Mr. Dan Albas (Central Okanagan—Similkameen—Nicola, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am proud to come from a riding where we have many wineries that help contribute to our economy. Many people take pride in the products Canadian vintners produce.

Recently an historic agreement was reached within the Canadian wine industry that will result in more transparent labelling for “cellared in Canada”, also known as blended in Canada wines. As this agreement requires the approval of the Canadian Food Inspection Agency, could the agriculture minister assure the House that he will expedite all processes and approvals in order to allow our wine industry to grow and prosper and grow in prestige worldwide?

Ms. Kim Rudd (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Natural Resources, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have visited the hon. member's lovely riding and have enjoyed some of the fine wines from British Columbia and wines from across the country.

The matter is under consideration by the minister. We will be happy to get back to the member very soon.

FINANCE

Mr. Dan Albas (Central Okanagan—Similkameen—Nicola, CPC): Mr. Speaker, most Canadians would be shocked that we spend more on servicing our federal debt than we do on national defence and that a finance department report projects that continued reckless spending by the Liberals means we will not see a balanced budget until 2050. The Liberals do not want Canadians to know how bad it all is. They have simply decided to shut down the finance committee rather than study their own government's report.

Can the vice-chair of the finance committee update Canadians on the priorities and planning of the finance committee for its upcoming meetings?

Mr. Ron Liepert (Calgary Signal Hill, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the member for his hard work on this file.

The member is absolutely correct that the finance committee has no work to do. The Liberals have proposed no agenda and no bills. Conservatives put forward two motions to study jobs and to study the long-term financial impact of this budget, and the Liberal members on committee voted those Conservative motions down.

Canadians sent Conservatives here to do work. Unfortunately, Liberal members on that committee do not think that way.

* * *

● (1155)

[*Translation*]

OFFICIAL LANGUAGES

Mr. Francis Drouin (Glengarry—Prescott—Russell, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, over 65% of people in Glengarry—Prescott—Russell call French their mother tongue.

We speak it at work, in business, and in our everyday lives; French is an integral part of our cultural heritage and diversity.

Can the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Immigration tell the House how our government is strengthening francophone communities outside Quebec through immigration?

Mr. Serge Cormier (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for Glengarry—Prescott—Russell for his interest in francophone immigration.

Very early on in its mandate, our government reinstated the Mobilité francophone immigration program, which was cancelled prematurely by the previous government. This program will support francophone and Acadian communities outside Quebec by attracting francophone talent.

As a francophone and an Acadian, I am very proud that our government continues to work with stakeholders, communities, and all members to meet or even exceed our objectives and support our vibrant francophone and Acadian communities across the country.

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NATIONAL DEFENCE

Mr. Pierre Paul-Hus (Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, CPC): Mr. Speaker, every day the Minister of National Defence demonstrates what a challenge it is for him to understand fairly basic concepts.

First, he made up a capability gap whose very existence the Royal Canadian Air Force denies. Second, contrary to a document he himself signed, he made a false claim about the Conservative government deploying our troops on Operation Impact without danger pay. Yesterday, he said that cadets do not use weapons, but the cadets website promotes marksmanship competitions.

Is the minister giving us facts or alternative facts?

[*English*]

Hon. Harjit S. Sajjan (Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we are committed to supporting our men and women in the Canadian Armed Forces. We do not send our troops into places like Kuwait without presenting the tax-free exemption. Our government actually got the tax-free exemption. That was done in February 2016, which was signed off by the finance minister.

We are conducting a defence policy review and making sure that we are going to be looking after our troops and not just making hollow promises, as the previous government had done.

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FISHERIES AND OCEANS

Mr. Dan Ruimy (Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the coast of B.C. is home to four globally unique glass sponge reefs, the Hecate Strait and Queen Charlotte Sound glass sponge reefs. Once thought to be extinct worldwide, these 9,000-year-old glass sponges offer a vital water filtration service and are home to many aquatic species.

Could the parliamentary secretary tell the House what the government is doing to protect this unique ocean feature?

Mr. Terry Beech (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Fisheries, Oceans and the Canadian Coast Guard, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to start by thanking the member and his constituents for their recent work on the Fisheries Act.

A few weeks ago, in B.C., the minister announced the Hecate Strait and Queen Charlotte glass sponge reefs marine protected area. These reefs are important habitat for many aquatic species, and I thank the indigenous, conservation, and industry partners involved in making this designation possible. Our government is further committed to increasing the proportion of marine and coastal areas that are protected to 5% this year and 10% by 2020. This is good news for Canada, and this is great news for future generations.

REFUGEES, CITIZENSHIP AND IMMIGRATION

Mr. Larry Maguire (Brandon—Souris, CPC): Mr. Speaker, last week we found out that the Liberals were cutting eight teacher positions in English language training at Brandon's Assiniboine Community College. Without language training, many of our immigrants and refugees will not be able to go to school, get jobs, or integrate into our communities.

Will the Liberal government reverse this disastrous decision and reinstate this much-needed funding?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Serge Cormier (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we are committed to fulfilling our obligations under the Official Languages Act. Language testing is used when individuals apply to certain permanent residence programs as economic immigrants.

Our department is looking for ways to level the accessibility playing field, and the cost of language testing will support the immigration application process.

Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada will work with the businesses and organizations that do the testing to improve the situation.

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THE ENVIRONMENT

Ms. Monique Pauzé (Repentigny, BQ): Mr. Speaker, in Texas last night, the Prime Minister received a prestigious award for his leadership in promoting dirty energy. When major polluters like Enbridge, TransCanada, BP, Shell, and others praise the Prime Minister for his policies, environmentalists and proponents of sustainable development have every reason to be concerned.

Can the Minister of Environment and Climate Change provide us with some assurance that her department and the government are not on the oil companies' payroll? She could do this by killing the energy east pipeline project.

● (1200)

[*English*]

Ms. Kim Rudd (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Natural Resources, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am happy to rise in the House again and talk about Canada having no stronger friend, partner, and ally than the United States. We share common values. We are pro jobs, pro business, and pro North America. That is why the Prime Minister and the minister are in Houston building those strong relationships with our North American partners.

We have taken a balanced approach to developing our energy resources by pricing carbon pollution and creating an oceans protection plan, all the while getting our resources to market and creating 25,000 good-paying middle-class jobs.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Mario Beaulieu (La Pointe-de-l'Île, BQ): Mr. Speaker, cuts that President Trump plans to make to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency threaten the water quality of the Great Lakes, which feed into the St. Lawrence.

Until Quebec is its own country, it has to ask Ottawa to act on its behalf. Will the federal government insist that the Americans protect Quebec's largest source of drinking water, or will it turn its back on Quebeckers once again, only to kneel before dirty oil and its buddy Trump?

[*English*]

Mr. Jonathan Wilkinson (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Environment and Climate Change, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Canada has a very long history of working collaboratively with the United States on issues associated with clean water in the Great Lakes. We remain committed as a government to the implementation of the Canada-U.S. Great Lakes Water Quality Agreement and to delivery on its Great Lakes commitments through a variety of national programs.

We look forward to ongoing collaboration with the U.S. administration. We will work alongside our U.S. and domestic partners to continue to promote strong action on clean water in the Great Lakes.

* * *

[*Translation*]

CANADA REVENUE AGENCY

Mr. Gabriel Ste-Marie (Joliette, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of National Revenue is telling tall tales. She should start a career in stand-up.

Yesterday, in response to my question, she said that the Canada Revenue Agency had very strict rules for former employees who leave to work in the private sector. In fact, there is just a handful of former CRA employees, six to be exact, who registered after going to KPMG.

Enough is enough. Can someone tell us why there are no serious screening rules in place for revenue experts who set off to work for the tax evading machine?

[*English*]

Ms. Kamal Khera (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Revenue, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as I have said before, and as the Minister of National Revenue stated before, the CRA's current post-employment policy is among the most stringent in Canada, and the specific disclosure of taxpayer information by either an employee or a former employee is prohibited by law. Let me be very clear. This prohibition has no time limit. An employee or any former employee of the CRA who violates these provisions could face sanctions, including fines or imprisonment.

* * *

INDIGENOUS AFFAIRS

Hon. Hunter Tootoo (Nunavut, Ind.): *Qujannamiik uqaqti.* Mr. Speaker, when meeting with the Daughters of the Vote in the House this Wednesday, the Prime Minister reiterated how past governments have failed indigenous people. Now is the time to right these wrongs.

The Government of Nunavut has submitted two investment requests to address Nunavut's immediate need for housing and energy generation infrastructure. Will the minister commit to ensuring that Nunavummiut receive this much needed funding?

Qujannamiik uqaqti.

Hon. Carolyn Bennett (Minister of Indigenous and Northern Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as the member knows, our government is taking important steps to close the totally unacceptable housing gap in northern communities. Budget 2016 invested $76.7 million over two years in Nunavut for housing. We also committed $10.7 million over two years for renewable energy projects in off-grid and northern communities.

We will continue to work with the member and the Government of Nunavut to promote the well-being of the Nunavummiut.

* * *

● (1205)

[*Translation*]

POINT OF ORDER

ORAL QUESTIONS

Mr. Joël Godin (Portneuf—Jacques-Cartier, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. Earlier, during oral question period, my colleague from Quebec and Minister of Families, Children and Social Development mentioned a figure about young people in my riding. We do not have the same numbers. I would like the hon. member to table his source in order to ensure that what he said in the House is true.

The Deputy Speaker: I think this is really a matter for debate, but I see that the hon. minister is rising. If he wants to reply, the hon. Minister of Families, Children and Social Development has the floor.

Hon. Jean-Yves Duclos (Minister of Families, Children and Social Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would be pleased to discuss with my colleague the positive impact of the Canada child benefit, not only in Canada and Quebec, but also in the Quebec City region and in his riding.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

[*English*]

GOVERNMENT RESPONSE TO PETITIONS

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

* * *

INTERPARLIAMENTARY DELEGATIONS

Ms. Leona Alleslev (Aurora—Oak Ridges—Richmond Hill, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 34(1), I have the honour to present to the House, in both official languages, the report of the Canadian delegation of the Canadian NATO Parliamentary Association respecting its participation at the joint meeting of the Ukraine-NATO Interparliamentary Council and the Sub-Committee on NATO Partnerships, in Brussels, Belgium, on November 23, 2015.

* * *

COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

GOVERNMENT OPERATIONS AND ESTIMATES

Mr. Tom Lukiwski (Moose Jaw—Lake Centre—Lanigan, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the fifth report of the Standing Committee on Government Operations and Estimates regarding the study of supplementary estimates (C) 2016-17.

FISHERIES AND OCEANS

Mr. Scott Simms (Coast of Bays—Central—Notre Dame, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the eighth report of the Standing Committee on Fisheries and Oceans on supplementary estimates (C).

In addition to that, because we are simply that efficient, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the ninth report of the Standing Committee on Fisheries and Oceans entitled "Main Estimates 2017-18".

NATIONAL DEFENCE

Mr. Stephen Fuhr (Kelowna—Lake Country, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the third report of the Standing Committee on National Defence in relation to that of the supplementary estimates (C) 2016-17.

* * *

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Hon. Pablo Rodriguez (Chief Government Whip, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, there have been discussions among the parties, and if you seek it you should find unanimous consent for the following motion:

> That notwithstanding any Standing Order or usual practice of the House, any recorded division demanded in respect of an item of Private Members' Business from Wednesday, March 8, 2017, to Tuesday, March 21, 2017, shall be deferred until the expiry of the time provided for Oral Questions on Thursday, March 23, 2017 and any recorded division already deferred to Wednesday, March 22, 2017, immediately before the time provided for Private Members' Business be deemed deferred a new until the expiry of the time provided for Oral Questions on Thursday, March 23, 2017.

● (1210)

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

(Motion agreed to)

* * *

PETITIONS

HAM RADIO TOWER

Mr. Sven Spengemann (Mississauga—Lakeshore, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to table a petition from a large group of concerned constituents in my riding of Mississauga—Lakeshore regarding the construction of a tall ham radio tower by a nearby resident in his backyard. This group is understandably and, in my view, justifiably alarmed, as a tower installation in a residential neighbourhood raises health, safety, and aesthetic concerns for that community. My team and I have worked closely with the City of Mississauga Ward 2 councillor, Karen Ras, to find a solution to this issue. I stand with the opponents of the ham radio tower, and I hope that this matter can be resolved satisfactorily and in a timely manner.

TAXATION

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant (Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to present a petition signed by campers who stayed at the Sutton Bay Park in New Liskeard, Ontario, on the shores of Lake Timiskaming, in the riding of Nipissing—Timiskaming. The petitioners call on the government to ensure that campgrounds with fewer than five full-time, year-round employees continue to be recognized and taxed as small businesses.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR YOUTH

Mr. Peter Schiefke (Vaudreuil—Soulanges, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is a privilege for me to rise in the House today to present a petition that was spearheaded by Isabel and Jane, founders of Sparkes of Hope, which is based out of my community of Vaudreuil—Soulanges. The petition calls upon the House of Commons and Parliament to create capacity in which Canadian youth aged 14 to 18 are permitted and encouraged to become legal members of a not-for-profit corporation's board of directors.

FALUN GONG

Mr. Robert-Falcon Ouellette (Winnipeg Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour of presenting a petition with hundreds of signatures by the citizens of Winnipeg. They call on the Canadian government to pass a resolution to establish measures to stop the Chinese Communist regime's crime of systematically murdering Falun Gong practitioners for their organs, to demand that Canadian legislators pass legislation to combat forced organ harvesting, as well as to publicly call for an end to the persecution of Falun Gong people and practitioners in China.

* * *

QUESTIONS PASSED AS ORDERS FOR RETURNS

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, if the supplementary response to Question No. 597, originally tabled on January 30, 2017, could be made into an order for return, the return would be tabled immediately.

The Deputy Speaker: Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

[*Text*]

Question No. 597—**Ms. Anne Minh-Thu Quach**:

> With regard to youth programs and services: (*a*) what are all of the federal programs for young people aged 15 to 24 or for organizations that help people in this age group, broken down by department, for the year 2016; and (*b*) for each of these programs and services, (i) what is their operating budget, (ii) what are their objectives, (iii) what are their criteria for determining the amount to grant to the requester?

(Return tabled)

[*English*]

Mr. Kevin Lamoureux: Mr. Speaker, furthermore, I would ask that all remaining questions be allowed to stand at this time.

The Deputy Speaker: Is that also agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[*English*]

NATIONAL SECURITY AND INTELLIGENCE COMMITTEE OF PARLIAMENTARIANS ACT

The House resumed consideration of Bill C-22, An Act to establish the National Security and Intelligence Committee of Parliamentarians and to make consequential amendments to certain Acts, as reported (with amendment) from the committee, and of the motions in Group No. 1.

Mr. Lloyd Longfield (Guelph, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is my pleasure today to rise in support of Bill C-22. This bill would create a national security and intelligence committee of parliamentarians. First, I would like to thank the members of the Standing Committee on Public Safety and National Security for its hard work on this file, and for what I understand was a great discussion at committee level.

Our government is committed to protecting both the national security of Canadians as well as Canadians' rights and freedoms. By establishing the national security and intelligence committee of parliamentarians, this government is fulfilling the promise that we made to Canadians in 2015. The role of the committee will be to ensure that the national security framework is working effectively to keep Canadians safe, and that the rights and freedoms of Canadians are also safeguarded.

It was 17 months ago that Canadians elected this government to produce real change in Canadian society. Bill C-22 is part of our plan to address the deficit of public trust between Canadians and the intelligence agencies that protect them. Restoring public trust will be no easy task. What it requires is a return to the basics of public service. We do not need to look hard to find these foundational principles. They are enshrined in our Constitution, now 150 years old. The phrase, “peace, order, and good government” has come to symbolize Canadian constitutional principles. These words hold truth today and are in fact fundamental to the mandate of this new committee.

Peace is a universally recognized Canadian value. This committee would have a hand in overseeing our military and intelligence agencies. Canadians have empowered their security agencies with the tools they need to keep Canada safe and to maintain public peace and security, yet there must be measures in place to ensure that these tools are not abused. This is why the committee will have a broad government-wide mandate, in fact, broader than other partners in the Five Eyes. This will allow the committee members to review any national security matter in all government departments and agencies, and, if security allows, present their findings to the House. Assuring citizens that their privacy is respected is a challenge that persists for democracies around the world. This next step would help to provide the transparency that Canadians overwhelmingly voted for in 2015.

"Order", the second foundational virtue of our Constitution, is a crucial element to the bill. Every democracy struggles to strike the appropriate balance between collective security and individual liberty. MPs and senators on the committee will have access to classified information and a robust mandate to review and to complete the scope of our national security framework throughout the federal government. All of our Five Eyes allies have similar committees, and the broad scope of this committee's mandate will make it a stronger body, as I mentioned earlier.

Here too, the government has struck a reasonable balance between peace and order. MPs and senators on the committee will have access to classified information, as well as the mandate to review the complete scope of Canada's national security framework.

However, there are provisions in the bill that limit access to certain information, such as ongoing military operations, cabinet confidences, and information related to ongoing law enforcement investigations. This balance ensures the security of classified information and the operational effectiveness of the DND, CSIS, and the RCMP, while also providing MPs and senators with adequate oversight to properly protect our Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

"Good government" is the final value reflected in this phrase. It is best embodied when we here and those in the upper house collaborate for the good of our country. With government amendments, the committee will be comprised of up to 11 members, eight from the House of Commons and three from the Senate. Up to five members of Parliament will be from the governing party.

● (1215)

This bill is an essential part of our national security strategy, which includes specific measures outlined in our platform, as well as consultations, so that Canadians can have their say about what other measures are needed.

Restoring public trust in Canada's security institutions is of critical importance. This is by no means the only measure the government will take to rebuild the public's confidence. The hon. Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness is currently reviewing Bill C-51, to make much-needed reforms.

There are many lessons that history has to teach. Perhaps the most important is the government's role in society. Government is an instrument for good, where people can come together and work toward common goals. As MPs, we cannot forget this simple truth. We are tasked with protecting the rights of the people we serve, as well as future generations. We must not become complacent and rely upon false comfort and assumptions. Constant vigilance by Canada's leaders to maintain these freedoms is included in the review recommendations of this bill.

This past summer, the former president of the United States, Mr. Obama, addressed this House and emphasized the truth of this. He quoted the late prime minister Pierre Trudeau when he said, "A country, after all, is not something you build as the pharaohs built the pyramids, and then leave standing to defy eternity. A country is something that is built every day".

If we are to keep building Canada as a monument to the world, we must take these words to heart.

To conclude, I urge my fellow MPs to support Bill C-22. The bill is a thorough and comprehensive piece of legislation. It would equip MPs with the resources they need to responsibly exercise their due diligence. I urge my colleagues to support the bill as a common-sense move to promote government accountability.

I welcome any questions from my colleagues.

● (1220)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre Nantel (Longueuil—Saint-Hubert, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his speech. However, I have to admit that I do not know what is happening here, because the people elected us to represent them in the House of Commons and to talk about federal issues.

The very principle of having committees that deal with specific subjects is based on the fact that this allows us to take a closer look at the details of certain bills. The Liberals made a commitment to create this oversight committee. The parliamentary committee that studied the issue made a series of recommendations and heard a great deal of testimony, which the government is completely ignoring. Why?

[*English*]

Mr. Lloyd Longfield: Mr. Speaker, yes, we do have a system of government that involves input from committees. Committees, such as the public safety committee, are able to have experts and hear testimony so the members can debate among themselves and come up with some recommendations that come forward to the government. Not all recommendations are adopted, but they are all taken into consideration. I know that some of the hon. committee members from the NDP had some of their suggestions come forward, which was unusual when compared with what the previous government was doing. Bill C-51 came through with no amendments, no amendments required, no amendments taken. In this case, we did have a very good discussion at committee. The discussion came forward to the government. The government makes its recommendations, which then go to the upper House and then come back for debate in Parliament, which is what we are doing right now.

I think the process is working. Not all committee members will get their amendments through, but it adds value to our conversation and in fact to our parliamentary democracy.

Mr. David de Burgh Graham (Laurentides—Labelle, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, whether we think he was a traitor or we think he was a hero, Edward Snowden exposed a lot of what was happening in the United States in the process.

I do not know if my colleague believes that is a good way of keeping accountability, or if it is a lot better to have a multipartisan committee of parliamentarians overseeing our intelligence agencies to make sure that what is going on is the right thing.

Mr. Lloyd Longfield: Mr. Speaker, we have a system of oversight. Having a committee that is able to look at the day-to-day operations, the day-to-day bills that we are considering in Parliament is one thing, but having another style of committee, which is a committee of parliamentarians that also includes members from the other place, really adds some value to having another third party looking at matters of security that often are not allowed to be made public because of the true nature of being items of security but are overviewed by elected officials.

Right now, we do not have that ability. Elected officials are not included in the process of security oversight. That is precisely what this committee is being set up to do.

● (1225)

Mrs. Kelly Block (Carlton Trail—Eagle Creek, CPC): Mr. Speaker, if openness and transparency were a currency, the government would be squandering it as fast as it is our taxpayers' hard-earned dollars.

By structuring the committee the way it has, the government has undermined the independence of it. I am wondering if the hon. member could speak to why the government has undermined the independence of this committee.

Mr. Lloyd Longfield: Mr. Speaker, as I am watching the discussion today, as well as the discussion that happened previously, it is fascinating to hear members of the Conservative Party talking about openness and transparency.

It is fascinating in terms of what we saw in the previous government. Actually, the former prime minister was found in contempt of Parliament for not respecting parliamentary discussions and for not respecting the oversight of committees.

In this case, we have a committee that is recommending a parliamentary committee to undo some of the lack of transparency that we had in the previous government.

Mr. Kelly McCauley (Edmonton West, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise today to speak to Bill C-22, an act to establish the national security and intelligence committee of parliamentarians and to make consequential amendments to certain acts, or, as I call it, another piece of bad legislation to cover for a campaign promise the Liberals made without really thinking it through.

There are some points I want to address in discussing this bill, as I mentioned: using bad legislation to cover for bad campaign promises, the problem with creating legislation that relies on putting blind trust in the government, a redundancy of some of the legislation, and what stakeholders are saying about the bill.

We start with a campaign talking point that turned out to be a poorly phrased policy platform: how to reconcile the Prime Minister's support of Bill C-51 when he was a third party leader and his current compulsion to oppose everything the previous government did. My colleague from Parry Sound—Muskoka said it perfectly when he said, "the devil is not only in the details; the devil is in the fundamental misappropriation of the bill to promise something to the electorate and then not deliver."

Today's legislation is just another in a string of poor attempts to cover up politically popular, but operationally difficult, campaign promises. This bill gives broad discretion over intelligence and national security discussions to the government, with "strong" oversight from the PMO, but not from Parliament. MPs are told to just trust the Liberals and they will figure it all out later. We know from their actions, though, they cannot be so easily trusted. They find ways to bend, break, and skirt the rules.

Therefore, we use the mechanisms within the House to hold the government to account and make sure that Canadians are aware of what the Liberal government is up to. Bill C-22 creates a committee with broad oversight, heavy Liberal influence, and public disclosure solely at the discretion of the PMO. It is a system designed to operate on blind trust in the government of the day, but we know that a strong and secure democratic system of government will ensure our security and liberty no matter who is in charge. Bill C-22, demanding that Canadians blindly trust the Liberals, does not accomplish this.

With their already lengthy track record of abuse of privileges, ethical lapses, and skirting responsibility for their mistakes, as well as their general contempt for the opposition when it opposes flawed legislation, I just cannot trust the government to act in the best interests of Canadians. Bill C-22 simply does not provide reasonable, meaningful mechanisms for parliamentary oversight.

Let us look at the track record of this bill. The special committee is appointed by, and reports to, the PMO. It should, instead, be appointed by, and report to, Parliament. The Prime Minister campaigned on a reduced role for the PMO, but his actions do not follow his words. Similarly, the Prime Minister, independent of any discussion with the other parties, appointed the committee chair in January before the legislation was even created. He refused to consult with the opposition parties, despite the public willingness of my party and the NDP to discuss this important committee. We were at the table, willing and ready to talk, but they stood us up.

The purpose of this committee is not to encourage and ensure transparency for the security agencies that are already as transparent as they can be while still protecting Canada and Canada's interests, rather it is a knee-jerk policy decision to shore up public support the Liberals lost when they voted in favour of Bill C-51 previously. Bill C-22 is a roundabout way for the Prime Minister's Office to direct the way our national security agencies function, effectively politicizing institutions that should always operate at arm's length from political sources. If the bill achieved some balance between oversight for parliamentarians and effective oversight for the committee while enhancing our national security, perhaps Conservatives could support it, but the bill, as it is, is purposeless.

Oversight agencies, including the Office of the Communications Security Establishment Commissioner, Civilian Review and Complaints Commission for the RCMP, the RCMP External Review Committee, National Defence and Canadian Forces ombudsman, and the Security Intelligence Review Committee are already mandated to provide oversight for each department or agency. This includes providing annual reports to Parliament.

Let us look at the membership process of the committee. Subclause 4(2) of the bill states:

> The Committee is to consist of not more than two members who are members of the Senate and not more than seven members who are members of the House of Commons. Not more than four Committee members who are members of the House of Commons may be members of the government party.

There are two members of the Senate, seven members of this House, and not more than four government members, so we could easily be looking at four parliamentary secretaries from the government, notably members who are accountable first to their cabinet ministers, two so-called independent senators, and three members of the opposition.

● (1230)

I have heard government members state that they only get up to, but not necessarily, four members. Let us be honest here. No one expects the government to appoint a majority made up of opposition members and Conservative senators.

We have seen all too often that the Prime Minister and his office truly believe that their unilateral decisions are the best courses of action for Canadians. They dictate the issues of the day and the alleged solutions to those issues.

The government House leader has offered amendments so that subclause 4(2) would instead read: "The Committee is to consist of not more than three members who are members of the Senate and not more than eight members who are members of the House of Commons. Not more than five committee members who are members of the House of Commons may be members of the government party".

Even with this, we could have five government members, three so-called independent senators, and three opposition members. We would still be faced with a Liberal majority on the committee that could unilaterally direct our intelligence and security agencies.

We always talk about how important it is to consult with the relevant stakeholders on legislation, so I will read what a couple of stakeholders are saying about Bill C-22. Here is a spoiler alert. It is not praise.

The Canadian Civil Liberties Association said:

> we are concerned by the government's power to halt a Committee investigation, or refuse to provide information, when it is deemed "injurious to national security." While we recognize that the utmost secrecy is sometimes required, this is particularly worrisome because these decisions are final, and are not subject to judicial review or any other dispute resolution process. Also concerning is the prime minister's power to redact Committee reports (without any evidence that redactions were made), as well as the numerous categories of information the committee cannot access. Furthermore, it should be the Committee members themselves—not the prime minister—that chooses the Committee chair.

The Civil Liberties Association seems to broadly agree with our concerns, that Bill C-22 would leave most of the discretionary decisions and oversight resolution mechanisms to the Prime Minister.

I am really not sure how the government can genuinely argue that it is increasing oversight by increasing the discretionary power of the PMO to censor information that claims to be injurious to national security but may actually just be injurious to the Liberal government.

The government seems to hide things it does not like. Just two weeks ago, members of the House debated a motion calling on the government to release the finance department's redacted data on a federal carbon tax. The information was unfavourable to the government, so it refused to disclose the information and voted it down.

The government has muzzled more than 100 public servants for life on the purchase of the politically motivated, sole-sourced Super Hornet purchase. We have heard testimony in committee that the government did not even bother to make these muzzled public servants aware of their rights under the Public Servants Disclosure Protection Act, but it sure went out of its way to muzzle them for life.

The Canadian Bar Association, which I understand might be versed on the impacts of laws, waded in on Bill C-22 by saying:

> While we have made suggestions and expressed concerns about various aspects of the Bill, our concerns about section 16 of the Bill are greater by several orders of magnitude. That section would provide broad discretion for Ministers and departments to refuse to provide information on vague national security grounds and on the basis of the expansive definition of 'special operational information' in the Security of Information Act.

Just recently, in the government operations and estimates committee, we heard how the government is making extensive use of national security exemptions to skirt rules on the procurement of such items as jackets for Syrian refugees, under the guise of national security, yet we are supposed to trust that government ministers are not going to opt out of the disclosure regime under Bill C-22 when they see fit.

However, it is okay, just trust that the Liberal government will always act in everyone's best interest, and shame on us for again questioning its so-called commitment to act openly and honestly.

I do not like legislation that relies solely on trusting the government to act properly. We have seen too many examples of the government hiding from responsibility for political gain, and this legislation will only make that easier, without tangibly increasing Canada's national security oversight.

As such, I cannot in good conscience support the bill.

● (1235)

Mr. David de Burgh Graham (Laurentides—Labelle, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I find it a little rich hearing about muzzling, coming from the Conservatives, who muzzled every federal scientist in the country for an extended period of time. It is an odd comment to make.

I have been hearing the Conservatives talk today about not being able to oversee operations going on in the community, which is clearly not the case, if they read the bill. The bill says that the committee will have the power to oversee anything operational unless there is a rejection by the minister, with an explanation for that particular operation. Generally, the committee will have the power to do the job it needs to do at all times. If it is blocked at any point, it would have to be clearly and expressly explained by the minister.

I wonder if the member has any comments on that.

Mr. Kelly McCauley: Mr. Speaker, the bill is very clear that ministers can interfere and suppress information. We saw in our operations committee, just a couple of weeks ago, that the government uses national security exceptions to skirt rules on purchases of paperclips and photocopy paper, yet somehow he wants us to believe that ministers will not interfere in major issues that may embarrass the government.

I do not have faith in a government that would suppress information on paperclips to have full access to suppress other information.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre Nantel (Longueuil—Saint-Hubert, NDP): Mr. Speaker, this is an extremely sensitive topic. Bill C-51 came up a lot during the election campaign. People talked about a great darkness, as my colleague opposite said. However, the Liberals supported Bill C-51, saying they would figure it all out later on, and that member was part of the team in charge in another capacity then.

Canadians have not forgotten. They remember. They remember that Bill C-51 was outrageous, regardless of what my colleagues over here think, and that the Liberals said they would figure it all out. The PMO has some nerve thinking it can appoint the committee chair.

Would my colleague care to comment on that? It makes no sense.

[*English*]

Mr. Kelly McCauley: Mr. Speaker, I agree with my colleague from the NDP. We often hear that committees in Parliament are their own masters, yet here we have a committee where the master was appointed by the PMO many months before this legislation even appeared. Basically it seemed to be a bone thrown to the committee chair as payment for past services, or perhaps as an apology for not getting a PS role or a cabinet role.

The Canadian Bar Association and many experts say that if we are to have this committee, the committee chair should be appointed by the actual committee members and not by the Prime Minister's Office.

Ms. Pam Goldsmith-Jones (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of International Trade, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would just like to remind everyone that the bill says that any request to withhold information would have to be explained to the committee, and if the committee was not happy with the minister's decision, it would have the opportunity to report back to Parliament.

It would be a legitimate platform in public, in Parliament, before all Canadians. I would be interested in the hon. member's comments on how that is not transparent and accountable.

Mr. Kelly McCauley: Mr. Speaker, I want to read further from the Canadian Bar Association regarding clause 16, which would allow ministers to hide or muzzle:

> Put simply, section 16 would gut the proposed law.... It would create a broad and largely standardless 'out clause' for Ministers to exempt themselves from the Committee's disclosure regime. The rationale for such an exemption is difficult to discern. The exemption seems unnecessary and illogical

I think that answers the question very clearly.

● (1240)

Ms. Pam Goldsmith-Jones (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of International Trade, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise to address the House with respect to the second reading of Bill C-22 establishing the national security and intelligence committee of parliamentarians.

Bill C-22 is about rebuilding trust with Canadians. It is about providing assurance that our national security and intelligence communities' activities are being conducted responsibly. Parliamentarians can and should play a major role in reviewing these activities. To that effect, our government made a commitment to an approach that protects our rights and freedoms and provides for the security of Canadians.

For many, Bill C-51 was cause for grave concern. Today, as our consultation analysis and improved legislation comes forward, it is a pleasure to demonstrate that we are being proactive and fair in our commitment to protecting Canada's national security and Canadians' rights and freedoms.

Democracy and freedom should never be taken for granted. Upholding democracy and freedom requires constant vigilance. Bill C-22 is a significant step forward. It stands against excessive powers of the state, something that I and many in the House believe in strongly.

Bill C-22 would provide a well-designed and sensible framework for the government to share highly classified information with selected members of Parliament from various parties, as well as senators, so that national security and intelligence activities in Canada would be subject to their scrutiny.

It is my pleasure to continue debate on this important bill that would help to protect both Canada's national security and Canadians' rights and freedoms. The amendments proposed by the government would strengthen the bill. The bill and an amendment brought forward by the committee would enable the national security and intelligence committee to review any federal department or agency, and now, because of a recent amendment, any crown corporation that performs national security or intelligence activities. This could be the Canadian Security and Intelligence Service, the Communications Security Establishment, the Canada Border Services Agency, or the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, for example.

The national security and intelligence committee of parliamentarians would have a government-wide mandate that would set it apart from other oversight bodies established to review a specific agency, such as the Security Intelligence Review Committee, the commissioner of the Communications Security Establishment, or the Civilian Review and Complaints Commission for the RCMP.

To ensure transparency, the national security and intelligence committee of parliamentarians would provide an annual report of its findings and recommendations to Parliament. It would also issue special reports at any time it considered it necessary. Because these reports would be available to the public, they would need to be submitted to the prime minister before tabling to ensure that they did not contain any classified information. However, I wish to emphasize the fact that the prime minister would not have any power to change the committee's findings and recommendations.

Bill C-22 would also enable the committee to provide classified reports to ministers at its own discretion. To ensure transparency about its reviews, the committee would be required to include a summary of these special reports in its annual report.

While it is vital to involve more parliamentarians in examining how federal agencies carry out their national security responsibilities, there must be some boundaries to ensure that ministers remain fully responsible and accountable for the activity of their departments.

Every department and agency of the security and intelligence community reports to a minister. That minister is ultimately responsible for the conduct of these departments and agencies. The minister is accountable to Parliament, and Canadians, for ensuring that the organization under her or his charge carries out its duties to keep Canadians safe while respecting our fundamental rights and freedoms. A minister may need to stop a review of a security or intelligence operation or may have to withhold sensitive operational information if the minister believes the review or the disclosure of the information could be harmful to national security.

I believe that such checks and balances are appropriate when we consider, for example, that the integrity of an active operation could be at stake. This is the reason our government has put forward amendments relating to access to information. Under the amendments proposed, ministers would not be able to use their power arbitrarily when it came to disclosing or not disclosing the information. Any request to withhold information would have to be explained to the committee, and if the committee was not happy with a minister's decision, it could report back to Parliament. The committee would have a legitimate platform to challenge a minister in public, in Parliament, before all Canadians.

Thanks to Bill C-22, the committee of parliamentarians would be able to hold the government to account. It would play a key role in ensuring that ministers took the necessary actions to address problems and fix deficiencies. It is clear that the bill would give the national security and intelligence committee of parliamentarians significant powers. It would also back it up with the necessary support through the creation of a secretariat.

● (1245)

It is also very important to stress the fact that the proposed national security and intelligence committee of parliamentarians' mandate and powers could only be changed through amendments to the legislation, that is to say, only through the will of Parliament. Nevertheless, the proposed legislation includes an obligation for a review of all of its provisions and operations after five years to make sure it is meeting its objective.

Bill C-22 demonstrates how the government is setting the bar higher when it comes to transparency and accountability concerning national security. Canadians can be confident that Parliament can and will hold the government to account.

Mr. David de Burgh Graham (Laurentides—Labelle, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the member's speech. I want to say that the committee did a lot of really good work. I wonder if the member could expand a bit more on the importance of having accepted some of the amendments that came forward from the opposition, ensuring that their committee work at the security committee here in Parliament will improve the overall process here.

Ms. Pam Goldsmith-Jones: Mr. Speaker, as the member knows, this whole process is much more than a campaign commitment. This process is about engaging parliamentarians and the country in order to address what was broadly perceived as excessive use of power under Bill C-51. Bill C-22 takes a significant step forward by providing that kind of oversight. Our country was in the minority really, one of the only countries in the G20 not to provide this kind of oversight. I believe we will see a much more robust, engaged assessment as we move forward, because it is intended to say that we are open and transparent about providing and balancing our freedoms with our security and safety.

Mr. Richard Cannings (South Okanagan—West Kootenay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I was wondering if the parliamentary secretary could comment on the fact that the government is insisting that the chair of this committee not be elected by the members of the committee itself, as is done in other committees like this in the United Kingdom, the United States, and elsewhere. Why are we doing something different here in Canada?

Ms. Pam Goldsmith-Jones: Mr. Speaker, as I mentioned in my remarks, the Prime Minister will be reviewing decisions by this committee, but has no power to change or alter recommendations. In that spirit, the Prime Minister will be acting in the best interests of Canadians to balance our freedoms, and our security and safety.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre-Luc Dusseault (Sherbrooke, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have a very simple question for my colleague, who seemed to be quite worried about Bill C-51 that passed in the previous Parliament.

She talked about some serious concerns regarding the excessive powers given to this country's security agencies; at the time, however, her party did not share those concerns. Instead, it voted in favour of Bill C-51—enthusiastically, I might add.

How can she reconcile her comments today to the effect that serious concerns remain about excessive powers with the fact that her party voted in favour of Bill C-51 at the time?

[*English*]

Ms. Pam Goldsmith-Jones: Mr. Speaker, on the contrary, I was elected in October 2015. I was not part of the former deliberations or government. I can assure the member opposite and all members of the House that Bill C-51 caused a grave amount of concern with respect to excessive use of powers that really belong to members of Parliament and Canadians. I am very pleased to support Bill C-22 today.

● (1250)

Mrs. Kelly Block (Carlton Trail—Eagle Creek, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to join this debate on Bill C-22 , the national security and intelligence committee of parliamentarians act.

I had the opportunity to comment on this legislation at second reading, and unfortunately, my concerns have not been addressed. As I noted earlier, this legislation prescribes a committee that would be a PMO working group rather than a parliamentary oversight committee.

Above all else, Parliament's role is to oversee the government and the executive. Unfortunately, Bill C-22 would make the reverse true. The government and the executive would oversee parliamentarians. The committee would report to the Prime Minister and not Parliament. The Prime Minister would have the power to censor the committee's reports. Parliamentarians on this committee would not be protected by parliamentary privilege as they undertake their work. This committee would not be able to provide parliamentary oversight of Canada's national security agencies, because it is not a committee of Parliament. It is not even close. Without support from more than the governing party, this committee would not have multi-partisan legitimacy and, therefore, have no discernible impact.

During the bill's review at committee, Conservative and NDP members presented amendments that would have made this committee of parliamentarians something that somewhat resembles a parliamentary committee by, amongst other things, giving the leader of each opposition party input into which opposition members sit on the committee. The response from the government side by voting against this amendment speaks volumes as to why this bill is meaningless.

I will quote the member for Eglinton—Lawrence:

> ...if this amendment were to be passed, the Prime Minister would no longer have full responsibility or accountability for recommending appointments to the committee. As this committee is an extension of the executive, which would report to the Prime Minister and the Prime Minister's Office, it would be contrary to the purpose of this bill.

The contention of the member for Eglinton—Lawrence is clear. The members of this committee would be chosen by the Prime Minister without consultation or input from the other party leaders. According to the member, giving someone other than the Prime Minister the right to nominate members to this committee would reduce the power of the executive, thus making it unacceptable to the government.

The purpose of this legislation is not to empower Parliament, but rather to empower the Prime Minister. The committee's membership is critical as the members would determine the committee's agenda, determine what witnesses they want to hear from and what questions should be asked. They would be reviewing the documents they request, and they would be writing the committee's reports. Additionally, and most importantly, the members would serve as a liaison between the committee and each caucus.

Nothing is more important to the success of a committee than its members and their ability to meaningfully participate in the committee's proceedings. The sum of their experiences and contributions to the committee's process would determine whether the committee is effective.

If the Prime Minister is unwilling to relinquish the responsibility of determining which members of Parliament sit on this committee, it is hard to consider this entire exercise of creating this committee as more than going through the motions to check off a box on his Liberal electoral platform.

Ms. Heather Sheehy from the Privy Council described what the committee would actually be:

> This committee is a committee of parliamentarians, as distinct from a committee of Parliament. The subclause that limits parliamentary privilege is consistent with a committee of parliamentarians, as distinct from a committee of Parliament.

Quite frankly, a committee of parliamentarians can be just about anything. The Conservative Party caucus hockey team can be considered a committee of parliamentarians. It does not mean it is an oversight body for the agencies and departments that oversee the security of Canadians.

The committee being made up of parliamentarians is simply not enough. The parliamentarians sitting on that committee must be given more power than what is being provided for in this legislation in order to be effective. As has been stated, Canada does not need to further enshrine executive oversight over its national security agencies. The executive in Canada, cabinet, already has oversight responsibilities of Canada's security agencies. In Canada, the executive branch is the Prime Minister's Office and the Privy Council Office that supports it.

● (1255)

The Prime Minister does not need to have a new advisory group of parliamentarians to provide him with input on Canada's national security. The supposed problem as outlined by the Liberals that this legislation was intended to solve was that Parliament, and not the executive, did not have the tools required to properly oversee our security agencies. Alternatively, the executive already has the ability to summon any member of Canada's security agencies to ask questions and order changes to operations, if necessary. Parliament does not. Therefore, it makes no sense to create another committee that reports to the executive.

The Liberal platform was clear on what it intended to do, which is to "create an all-party committee to monitor and oversee the operations of every government department and agency with national security responsibilities".

In order to fulfill this commitment, the leaders of the opposition parties should have the responsibility of naming their members to the committee, and Parliament must have the autonomy to oversee every government department and agency with national security responsibilities. If a committee is to be part of the decision-making process, then it should be allowed to impact policy. It should also be noted that when in opposition, the Liberals called for this very kind of parliamentary oversight. If, however, the PMO chooses to set up this committee purely for advisory purposes, then it will lose the true advantage of presenting a diversity of views to Canada's security agencies and the quality of advice that they receive will be compromised.

Furthermore, when it comes to changing Parliament's Standing Orders or the appointment of an officer of Parliament, the governing party typically goes to great lengths to ensure that it has the support of all parties. This is done to ensure that any change to the Standing Orders does not benefit the governing party or the opposition. It also ensures that each officer of Parliament begins work with the support of all parliamentarians behind them, thus giving them a real mandate for that work.

Unfortunately, the creation of this committee breaks all the rules that typically govern this place. This committee would not even have a mandatory quorum that is set by Parliament. It is almost laughable that the chair of the committee could be the only one present and be able to receive evidence.

As members of all parties would be serving on this committee, it only makes sense that a majority of members from all parties support its creation, its mandate, how it conducts its business, and how it would eventually report back to Parliament. Throughout the legislative process, all opposition parties have tried to make this committee more of an agent of Parliament, while the government has insisted that it must be an agent of the executive. Unfortunately, the government has voted down these practical amendments from the opposition.

In conclusion, I am disappointed by this legislation. I cannot shake the impression that this entire piece of legislation is simply a facade for the Prime Minister to say that he fulfilled a campaign commitment. If that is the case, he has failed to fulfill both the spirit and the letter of that very commitment. As long as this committee remains a working group of the Prime Minister, it will have no legitimacy or practical use.

Mr. David de Burgh Graham (Laurentides—Labelle, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the member for Carlton Trail—Eagle Creek for acknowledging that this is a Liberal platform commitment that we are indeed fulfilling.

As the member knows, coming out of committee, Bill C-22 firmly enshrines in the legislation that government MPs cannot form a majority on this committee. Also, this committee would have powers to report to Parliament, including on obstruction by a minister, which the majority of the committee, which does not need to include the support of a single government member, have decided is undue. The member describes this as somehow giving the power of the committee to the Prime Minister, and speaks of it as "laughable".

The government caucus contains no senators. If a future Conservative government wants to continue to appoint partisan senators, that is something the Conservatives can take up with the electorate.

Mrs. Kelly Block: Mr. Speaker, I am not sure I heard a question. I do not think there was one there.

However, what is important and what we are highlighting during this debate is the difference in what the Liberals called for when they were in opposition, what they committed to during the campaign, and what they have introduced in this place. I think that if Canadians are watching this debate, they will begin to understand the hypocrisy in this piece of legislation.

● (1300)

Mr. Richard Cannings (South Okanagan—West Kootenay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, could the member comment on the fact that although every member of this committee will have to have top secret clearance, will have to swear a permanent oath of secrecy, and will have to waive their immunity to prosecution based on any breach, but despite this, these members will not have the same access to the sensitive information that existing committees in Canada such as SIRC already have? Does this show some lack of trust that the government has in our elected representatives?

Mrs. Kelly Block: Mr. Speaker, the short answer to that is "yes". I believe that the committee will not be able to do real work. The lack of independence as described by the bill is really the problem and the lack of trust that it purports in the members who will be appointed to the committee.

Mr. David de Burgh Graham: Mr. Speaker, I am wondering if the member is aware that when the Speaker says "questions or comments", one can ask a question or make a comment?

Mrs. Kelly Block: Mr. Speaker, I do appreciate that and I meant no offence in recognizing that there perhaps was no question in that comment.

Mr. Adam Vaughan (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Families, Children and Social Development (Housing and Urban Affairs), Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is an honour to be able to speak to this extraordinarily important piece of legislation. Before I reference parts of the bill, I would like to provide a bit of background as to where my perspective emanates from. I was a member of Toronto City Council on the Police Services Board, and in particular on the Police Services Board during the G20 summit when elected officials were presented with information that they could not share with their constituents, despite the fact that they were on the board precisely because they represented constituents. It was a very trying period to provide oversight to an important police body and an important security operation. They had no capacity to talk to those in charge of the operation because it was nestled in the Ontario Provincial Police at the time, not at the City of Toronto as many think it was. At the same time they could not relate back to their constituents the steps they were taking to protect their civil rights and make sure that their rights to political protest as well as access even to their homes were going to be guaranteed.

Therefore, civilian oversight is at the heart of any democracy and is at the heart of any responsible approach to public safety, let alone intelligence and security measures that we are now embarking upon, which when Parliament was conceived were not really perceived as being part of the responsibility of Parliament but rather the executive branch and others in society. As Parliament has evolved over the last few centuries, we have been evolving the practice of stronger and stronger civilian oversight, in particular around public accountability for the way in which our police and security agencies operate. We have also developed, expanded, and layered our security and our police bodies as we have taken on more and more complex matters. Society has changed and we have become more cognizant of the realities that we have to encounter. As a result, there is not a single police operation that Parliament oversees but rather close to 17, 18, or 19. We could even include border security now in that, which we need to explore as dynamics change in an ever-evolving world.

Into this mix, we have had over the last decade, even the last 20 years I would argue, significant powers invested into our security agencies. What has not kept pace is an oversight body that is as complex and as far reaching as those agencies now are. When the RCMP was originally looked at as a security force way back when, 100-plus years ago, there was no need to think of it as a spy agency dealing with foreign interventions coming into this country. It was a completely different colonial period of time when it was conceived.

CSIS flew straight out of the inadequacies both in the regulation and the oversight of the RCMP, when that was discovered in the 1970s. When CSIS was established, a whole new chapter of security agencies was brought to bear in terms of the way in which this country and this Parliament prosecuted public safety. However, the rules and regulations that were brought in for CSIS were not applied to other elements of the government. We get into electronic surveillance, intelligence sharing with our allies, and the complexities that technology has brought to this issue. It is clear that it is time for a revisit as to how we provide civilian oversight, as I said the corner of democracy, to make sure that we are protecting both people's public safety and their private safety as well as their civil liberties and society's civil liberties. That is the challenge that we are trying to address with the bill in front of us.

Over the last decade in particular, the powers invested in our security agencies have been strengthened, but the powers of oversight have not. What this Bill C-22 seeks to do is strengthen those oversights. One of the most important components of this bill is that the committee would be struck in a way that it would report directly to Parliament. I know the opposition has talked about it going through the executive branch because the Privy Council Office and the Prime Minister's Office, in particular, have the ability to screen it to make sure that the reports that have been tabled in public do not compromise public safety. That is a prudent measure, it is not a political measure. It is a measure that has been put in place in particular to keep sensitive information away from public eyes, not to stop the work of the committee or the advice that the committee would give Parliament as it relates to public safety. That is a critical distinction to make. All redactions and all screenings would have to be justified in writing both to the committee and to Parliament and would have to be understood as such, as being filters that do not preclude activity or preclude areas of examination but rather make sure that the reporting of those activities is done in the safest way possible to protect our public safety environment.

The other thing that is critically important here is there has been criticism that it would not be a parliamentary committee but rather a committee of parliamentarians. The language there might sound very familiar, just a set of words reordered, but a committee of parliamentarians means that it would include the Senate.

● (1305)

Again, I think this is a critical piece of evolution. It would allow us to sit down with both chambers, both of which have carriage of public safety in this country, to make sure that real information and sensitive information are delivered in real time to both bodies, so that both bodies can make quick decisions when quick decisions are needed. What we know from the ever-evolving situation globally and internally in this country is that quick decisions are part of what of what we have to accommodate as we move through accountability practices in this country.

The other issue which I think is critically important is that the government would not have a majority on this committee. Let that be said again. It would be a committee of parliamentarians where government would not have a majority. This means that the activities, the advice, the description, and the publication of what is being done is constituted by a majority of parliamentarians who are outside of government, let alone outside of the executive branch. In other words, if the belief of some members of Parliaments is that civil liberties or public safety in the areas of inquiry are being frustrated by the government, they would have the ability, as a majority committee, to make a committee report to that effect and bring public pressure. That is the best form of accountability to bring to bear on the activities of this committee.

The other thing which I think is critically important to understand, as well, is that currently there are silos in which the different security agencies operate, and with the accountability officers for those different security agencies, all 17 to 19, depending on one's view of the configuration of the list, that is not shared in real time. The information among those organizations is shared in real time, but the accountability is not conducted in a coordinated, overreaching, and overarching method. What this committee would achieve is to bring that together under one accountability model. It would measure the relationships between these two organizations, or several different organizations, and make sure that the information that is being shared, the practices that are being pursued, the behaviour of these agencies, are consistent across all of government as we move to protect both civil liberties and the public's right to public safety.

These issues allow us to broaden the access of parliamentarians to security, and sensitive information and sensitive operations. Instead of just being housed inside the executive branch now, it is housed inside the Parliament of Canada. That, again, is a critically important development. It is one that fulfills our mandate and our promise to the electorate that sent us here to make sure that we strengthen, broaden, and engage all of Parliament as we try to make sure that public safety in this country is done with the most accurate, up-to-date, and effective civilian oversight possible. That is a principle that this party will not step back on.

I would like to also reference a couple of other components of the bill which I think are critically important. The notion that this is somehow not fulfilling our mandate, I think is just wrong. In fact, if we listen to the experts who were critical of the previous government's approaches to public safety, what we hear is that they are in accordance with us.

Craig Forcese said, "this will be a stronger body than the UK and Australian equivalents. [It will be] a dramatic change for Canadian national security accountability. [It's] a good bill." He gives it a high pass.

The criticism of Bill C-51 largely emanated from this individual, and now the support is coming from this individual. Clearly, we have moved the yardsticks.

I am going to leave members with one last thought. I think this is a critical thought, as well.

There is a notion somehow, and I certainly saw it in Bill C-51 when I was here in the previous term, that governments can land on public safety issues or civil rights issues perfectly, every time that they present legislation. That is a fallacy. In fact, I would say that is an arrogance.

Public safety and civil rights in particular are iterative processes. We move forward carefully. We move forward prudently. We expand rights. We protect rights simultaneously as best we can. However, we never get it right. Circumstances change. The behaviour of institutions changes. Individual officers within these organizations behave in particular ways.

It is a constant moving target that we are trying to deal with here, both the need to protect Canada's public safety and the need to protect charter rights. This process, as we establish this committee, I can guarantee members will evolve over time. It must evolve over time, because the circumstances we are dealing with are evolving over time. To do it in a way that is responsible is to do it in a way that is open and parliamentary and accountable to this body, and not to the executive branch.

That is exactly what this legislation would achieve. It would allow us to make significant steps forward at this time. I assure members that as long as I am sitting in this House, the conversation around good legislation, strong ideas, and intelligent criticism that emerges around how we balance the complexities of the security environment which we live in, how we make sure that civil liberties are protected as we protect public safety, needs to be sustained.

I take the ideas that frame that endeavour and that work of this Parliament very seriously. I think members have seen over the last couple of days that when strong ideas and intelligent criticism are presented on the floor of this Parliament, all parliamentarians have the ability to say, "That's a good idea. Let's support that, and let's move that into law and move that forward to protect Canadians or develop Canadians rights."

● (1310)

That is what this bill would do. It is in the spirit of that kind of thinking, that kind of discipline around public safety and civil rights. That is the hallmark of the Liberal Party and this government. I am proud to support this bill because it continues that reputation.

Mr. Todd Doherty (Cariboo—Prince George, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I think what we saw in the last speech was a campaign to be on the committee. The member across the way was campaigning hard, on the record, that he has a great command of what this committee should and should not be. The hon. colleague perhaps wants to be on the committee, or maybe he already has a spot on it that has already been planned and he already knows about.

In the spirit of our hon. colleague's speech, which talked about the open and transparent ways of his government, I have one simple question. Why was not one recommendation from the Conservative opposition taken, heeded, and considered in the amendments of this bill?

Mr. Adam Vaughan: Mr. Speaker, I apologize for not being able to answer that question more directly. I was not party to the committee debates or how the specific amendments that the member is speaking to were handled, as I have not seen them.

Let me stress that this is an ongoing process. This Parliament has carriage of many of these issues, and the Senate does as well. Therefore, good ideas, perhaps reframed, rethought, and reworded, may prevail when presented in a different light or with a different focus in terms of the specifics of the words.

I will quickly address the notion that I want to be on this committee. Having served for two years on the Toronto Police Services Board, let me assure the member that I have done my duty as someone providing civilian oversight. I am confident that there are members with better minds than mine in this House who could sit on this committee. If it requires being said in public, I will say now that I do not want to be on this committee. However, I thank him for the—

The Deputy Speaker: Questions and comments, the hon. member for Sherbrooke.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre-Luc Dusseault (Sherbrooke, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his contribution to the debate.

Bill C-22 is meant to be a direct response to Bill C-51. In fact, when we were debating Bill C-51, my Liberal colleagues often brought up this issue. They said that we needed to ensure some kind of parliamentary oversight of Canada's intelligence organizations. However, they went ahead and supported Bill C-51 anyway, even though the Conservative bill included no such measures.

Why did the Liberals support that bill in the first place, and why did they trust the Conservatives or the next government to fix the part of the legislation that deals with parliamentary oversight?

● (1315)

[*English*]

Mr. Adam Vaughan: Mr. Speaker, this is not the first time that I have faced this line of questioning from the New Democrats, so I have a prepared answer for this.

First of all, Bill C-51 did a few things right. The modification to the no-fly list to prevent people from getting on airplanes, as opposed to simply stopping hijacking situations, was a very important transition that needed to be understood. We no longer had a no-fly list that dealt with what might happen on an airplane, but what might happen when the airplane landed and people deployed into other countries. We should not be exporting fighters into foreign wars where national interests and national security are quite clearly at stake. We need to manage that differently, and that is what some of the changes in Bill C-51 did.

There were a number of small changes like that. Expanding preventative detention by a number of days was prudent in light of the complexity of the way that attacks were materializing. It required a different thinking and approach to how we use preventative detention. That is not unlike the way in which some Criminal Code provisions in this country already operate. It simply was extended to areas of terrorism and national security. Those were some of the fine points that we found needed to be strengthened as we started to embark upon changes to Bill C-51. We thought they were quite clearly important.

This is the third time that this Parliament has tried to deal with civilian oversight of our security agencies. The NDP has never once supported civilian oversight when it has been on the floor for a vote.

My question to the NDP is this. How do you protect democracy without civilian oversight? Why has that party historically voted against every single proposition put forward by this party in this House when the opportunity has arisen? Why will the New Democrats not strengthen it incrementally? Why do they leave it in the hands of experts instead of the public, where it should be if we are to have true civilian oversight?

[*Translation*]

Mr. David de Burgh Graham (Laurentides—Labelle, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to speak to Bill C-22 as reported to the House of Commons by the Standing Committee on Public Safety and National Security.

We have been discussing the need for such a committee of parliamentarians for more than a decade, so this is an idea whose time has come. We lost 10 years. In fact, Canada has some catching up to do with our closest allies.

We, along with Australia, New Zealand, the United Kingdom, and the United States, have an intelligence-sharing arrangement that dates back to the early days of the Cold War. Our alliance is known as the "Five Eyes".

Every other member of the "Five Eyes" alliance has a body of legislators with special access to classified information relating to national security and intelligence matters. Further, I submit that the broad scope of the Canadian committee's mandate will make it an even stronger body than many equivalents elsewhere.

I would like to explain to the House how the National Security and Intelligence Committee of Parliamentarians, or NSICOP, as proposed in Bill C-22, will compare to frameworks that our allies have established to provide parliamentary oversight of security and intelligence activities.

I will limit my comparison to models in the other Westminster parliamentary tradition in the Five Eyes, namely Australia's Parliamentary Joint Committee on Intelligence and Security, or PJCIS, and the U.K. and New Zealand, which have each established an Intelligence and Security Committee, known respectively as ISC-UK and ISC-NZ.

There are several similarities between the proposed Canadian committee, called NSICOP, and the parliamentary review committees of those three countries.

The membership of these three committees ranges from 5 to 11 members, appointed by the Prime Minister in consultation with opposition parties. We currently have before us a motion from the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons to increase the size of the NSICOP under Bill C-22 from 9 to 11, which will allow for one additional member from each House of Parliament.

I support this amendment, as it provides the additional flexibility to ensure that the NSICOP's membership reflects a diversity of views within Parliament. Canada's NSICOP will be similar to our allies' committees in that committee members will be bound to secrecy.

The mandates of our allies' committees include the authority to examine matters related to the administration, policy, legislation, and expenditures of national security departments and agencies, but they differ markedly in the examination of operations. I will come back to that shortly.

Each country imposes similar restrictions on the public reports of their committees to ensure that no classified information is disclosed.

In the other Westminster systems, as in Canada, the work of the committee is supported by staff that is required to have the appropriate security clearances.

When it comes to access to classified information, the other Westminster democracies also define the scope of that power by legislation. Generally, there are limits on the power to access certain information.

For example, details about sources, methods, and operations, or whether the information was provided by a foreign government may not be disclosed to the committees.

Each of the Westminster countries authorizes the executive branch, namely the minister responsible for the department or agency under review, with powers to withhold sensitive information to ensure that the national interest and security are not harmed.

The standing committee has made some significant changes to this area of Bill C-22. In particular, it deleted almost all of the provisions in clauses 14 and 16 of the bill. This includes provisions that protect important types of information such as the identities of sources and persons in the witness protection program.

I am pleased to see that the government has carefully considered the spirit and intent of the standing committee's changes, and is suggesting a compromise approach. We have before us a motion by the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons to restore clause 16 and partially restore clause 14.

Under this approach, the national security intelligence committee of parliamentarians would be provided with access to as much information relevant to its mandate as possible, with restrictions applied only where necessary to prevent harm to individuals, ongoing police investigations, or national security.

● (1320)

I believe this is a responsible, balanced approach, and I urge all members to join me in supporting these amendments.

I have, until now, described similarities between what is proposed in Bill C-22 and what is already in place among our Five Eyes allies, but the proposed national security and intelligence committee of parliamentarians will be different from parliamentary review elsewhere in some significant ways.

The differences among the Five Eyes allies relate to the scope of the committees' mandates, that is to say, the extent to which each committee can examine various institutions involved in national security. The other three Westminster models limit the jurisdiction of their committee to the main national security agencies. The UK and New Zealand allow for additional agencies or programs to be added, but only if the government agrees.

Bill C-22 will give Canada's committee of parliamentarians a broader mandate. Committee members will be able to examine any national security and intelligence activity conducted by the Government of Canada, regardless of which department or agency is conducting this activity. This will include the main security and intelligence agencies, that is to say, the Canadian Security Intelligence Service, the Communications Security Establishment, and the Royal Canadian Mounted Police, as well as the other 17 or so other federal organizations that have national security responsibilities, such as the Canadian Border Services Agency.

One of the amendments reported to us by the Standing Committee will make it clear that the committee of parliamentarians' mandate and access to information includes crown corporations. I support this amendment, which is entirely consistent with the committee's government-wide mandate.

As mentioned earlier, when it comes to the mandate that the committees have over operations, the Five Eyes countries differ considerably in their approaches. The committees in Australia and New Zealand have no mandate to consider operational matters. In the U.K., the committee may review operations, but only if it meets certain conditions, namely, that the Prime Minister has agreed that it is not part of an ongoing operation and that the matter is of significant national interest.

The U.K. committee may only review an ongoing operation if the matter is referred by the British government. Under the bill before us, the Canadian committee would have a broader mandate to review national security and intelligence activities. It would, for example, be able to examine ongoing operations on its own initiative, with the proviso that the minister could stop a review for reasons of national security.

I am pleased to see that the standing committee has strengthened this aspect of the bill by clarifying that operational reviews may only be stopped for national security reasons during the period that the operation in question is ongoing, and that once the operation is complete the parliamentary committee may resume its review. Furthermore, the instances in which this authority is used will be part of the committee's annual reporting to Parliament, ensuring government accountability in this area.

Another unique feature of this bill is the ability of the committee to engage with the three existing Canadian review bodies that are dedicated to reviewing particular agencies, that is to say, the Civilian Review and Complaints Commission for the RCMP, the Security Intelligence Review Committee for CSIS, and the Commissioner of the Communications Security Establishment. This ensures that the committee's work can be informed by the work of these highly focused and expert review bodies.

I have outlined the similarities and differences between what is included in Bill C-22 and how our allies among the Five Eyes implement similar oversight and review of security and intelligence matters. We have taken some of the best practices from our allies and gone further to establish a strong, accountable, and transparent review of Canada's security and intelligence community's activities.

This is truly a made-in-Canada approach to parliamentary review of security and intelligence. Our country may be late in creating a parliamentary review committee, but Canadians will now have a bold and forward-looking framework for this committee of parliamentarians. Establishing the committee underscores our commitment to be more open and transparent and keep our country safe.

● (1325)

I commend the government for engaging with the standing committee in a constructive and thoughtful manner to improve Bill C-22. I urge honourable members to join me in supporting the amendments proposed by the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and the passage of this important bill.

[*English*]

Mr. Richard Cannings (South Okanagan—West Kootenay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I asked this question earlier of a Conservative member but I would like to see what the response is from the other side of the aisle.

Members of the committee would have to take an oath of secrecy. They would have to be cleared for top secret information. They would have to be aware that they could be charged under the law if there is any breach, and yet they would not be given the same access to information that members of other security committees in Canada, such as SIRC, are given. I am wondering why the government does not trust elected members of this body.

Mr. David de Burgh Graham: Mr. Speaker, there is virtually no information the committee cannot have access to. If access is not granted, that has to be justified in writing by the affected minister, and I cannot see that being used particularly often.

More importantly, the members should be covered by secrecy laws, because it does not make sense for a member to have access to state secrets at this level and then be able to come into the House and spew them and be protected by parliamentary privilege.

The Deputy Speaker: We are just about out of time for questions and comments.

I see the hon. member for Coast of Bays—Central—Notre Dame rising perhaps on a point of order.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

[*English*]

COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

PUBLIC SAFETY AND NATIONAL SECURITY

Mr. Scott Simms (Coast of Bays—Central—Notre Dame, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I most certainly am rising on a point of order.

There have been discussions among the parties and if you seek it, I believe you should find unanimous consent for the following motions.

I move:

That, in relation to its study of Canada's National Security Framework, seven members of the Standing Committee on Public Safety and National Security be authorized to travel to Washington, D.C., United States of America, in the Spring of 2017, and that the necessary staff accompany the Committee.

● (1330)

The Deputy Speaker: Does the hon. member have unanimous consent to move the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

(Motion agreed to)

FISHERIES AND OCEANS

Mr. Scott Simms (Coast of Bays—Central—Notre Dame, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I move:

That, in relation to its study of the Oceans Act's Marine Protected Areas, seven members of the Standing Committee on Fisheries and Oceans be authorized to travel to Vancouver, Masset, Queen Charlotte, Sandspit and Prince Rupert, British Columbia, Inuvik, Paulatuk and Tuktoyaktuk, Northwest Territories, in the Spring of 2017, and that the necessary staff accompany the Committee.

The Deputy Speaker: Does the hon. member have unanimous consent to move the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

(Motion agreed to)

VETERANS AFFAIRS

Mr. Scott Simms (Coast of Bays—Central—Notre Dame, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I move:

That, in relation to its Comparative Study of Programs and Support Offered to Veterans and their Families in Other Jurisdictions, seven members of the Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs be authorized to travel to Washington, D.C., United States of America, in the Spring of 2017, and that the necessary staff accompany the Committee.

The Deputy Speaker: Does the hon. member have unanimous consent to move the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

(Motion agreed to)

INTERNATIONAL TRADE

Mr. Scott Simms (Coast of Bays—Central—Notre Dame, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I move:

That, in relation to its study of the Priorities of Canadian Stakeholders Having an Interest in Bilateral and Trilateral Trade in North America, Between Canada, United States and Mexico, seven members of the Standing Committee on International Trade be authorized to travel to the Detroit Metropolitan Area, Michigan, the Chicago Metropolitan Area, Illinois, Washington, D.C., Sacramento, the San Francisco Bay area and Silicon Valley, California, the Seattle Metropolitan Area, Washington, and to the Denver Metropolitan Area, Colorado, United States of America, in the Spring of 2017, and that the necessary staff accompany the Committee.

The Deputy Speaker: Does the hon. member have unanimous consent to move the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

(Motion agreed to)

AGRICULTURE AND AGRI-FOOD

Mr. Scott Simms (Coast of Bays—Central—Notre Dame, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I move:

That, in relation to its study of Canada-United States Cooperation in Agriculture, seven members of the Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food be authorized to travel to Washington, D.C., United States of America, in the Spring of 2017, and that the necessary staff accompany the Committee.

The Deputy Speaker: Does the hon. member have unanimous consent to move the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

(Motion agreed to)

FOREIGN AFFAIRS AND INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Mr. Scott Simms (Coast of Bays—Central—Notre Dame, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I move:

That, in relation to its study of the United States and Canadian Foreign Policy, seven members of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development be authorized to travel to Washington, D.C. and to Detroit and Lansing, Michigan, United States of America, in the Spring of 2017, and that the necessary staff accompany the Committee.

The Deputy Speaker: Does the hon. member have unanimous consent to move the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

(Motion agreed to)

ENVIRONMENT AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Mr. Scott Simms (Coast of Bays—Central—Notre Dame, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I move:

That, in relation to its study of Canada-U.S. Environment Partnerships and Transborder-Related Issues, seven members of the Standing Committee on Environment and Sustainable Development be authorized to travel to Washington, D.C., United States of America, in the Spring of 2017, and that the necessary staff accompany the Committee.

[*Translation*]

The Deputy Speaker: Does the hon. member for Coast of Bays—Central—Notre Dame have the unanimous consent of the House to move the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

(Motion agreed to)

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[*English*]

NATIONAL SECURITY AND INTELLIGENCE COMMITTEE OF PARLIAMENTARIANS ACT

BILL C-22—NOTICE OF TIME ALLOCATION MOTION

Hon. Bardish Chagger (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister of Small Business and Tourism, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, conversations are ongoing between the parties. Regrettably, I would like to advise that therefore, agreements could not yet be reached under the provisions of Standing Orders 78(1) or 78(2) with respect to the report stage and third reading stage of Bill C-22, an act to establish the national security and intelligence committee of parliamentarians and to make consequential amendments to certain acts.

Under the provisions of Standing Order 78(3), I give notice that a minister of the crown will propose at the next sitting a motion to allot a specific number of days or hours for the consideration and disposal of proceedings at those stages.

I really do hope that we will be able to come to an agreement.

The Deputy Speaker: It being 1:35 p.m., the House will now proceed to the consideration of private members' business, as listed on today's Order Paper.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

● (1335)

[*Translation*]

FOOD AND DRUGS ACT

Mr. Pierre-Luc Dusseault (Sherbrooke, NDP) moved that Bill C-291, An Act to amend the Food and Drugs Act (genetically modified food), be read the second time and referred to a committee.

He said: Mr. Speaker, I have the great honour to rise today in the House to kick off the debate on my initiative, Bill C-291. Members who are not ministers seldom have the opportunity to debate and eventually pass bills to amend existing laws or to create brand new ones.

Mine is a very simple bill, which has already been debated in the House a few times in the past. Almost 10 years have passed since this issue was raised in the House, but I believe it is the right time to do so.

My bill concerns the mandatory labelling of genetically modified food. The purpose of the bill is simple: to obtain more transparent information on the labels of food that is consumed in Canada because Canadians have the right to know in detail what they consume. That is why I introduced Bill C-291, which we are debating today.

Let me set the stage by first quoting the Prime Minister of Canada. As recently as December 15, 2016, in response to a question about mandatory labelling for genetically modified foods, he said on Radio-Canada, “This is about protecting consumers. I am hearing consumers say loud and clear that they want to know more about what they are putting in their bodies. This is a good thing. We are working with them.”

This works out quite well; I am going to give him the opportunity to work on it, since he will soon have a chance to vote on my bill. I hope he will vote to support it, since he committed to work on this issue. This is the perfect opportunity for him, for all government members, and for the opposition members, to walk the talk.

My motivations and reasons for introducing this bill can be summed up rather quickly. Naturally, I was very familiar with this issue before being elected to the House, but it was shortly after I was elected in 2011 that I began meeting regularly with André Nault, an active member of the group Amis de la terre de l'Estrie. He worked on this issue for nearly his whole life. Sadly, he has passed away, but I still wanted to recognize all the work he did and the fact that he came to see me on a number of occasions to talk about this issue, Canadians' right to be informed. Several times he drew my attention to the need for the House to pass legislation like this bill. I want to commend his work and the work done by Amis de la terre de l'Estrie. Even though he is gone, that group is continuing his work to demand not only that genetically modified foods be labelled, but that Canadians have access to healthy, high-quality food.

As I said earlier, this is a unique opportunity, so I thought long and hard about the bill to put forward. I spent a lot of time thinking about it, and I want to give my wife, Joanie, some credit for her part in the process. We talked about the issue, and she encouraged me to introduce this bill. This is important to her too.

I want to emphasize that my main goal in introducing this bill is to make sure Canadians get the information they have asked for over and over. Like the Prime Minister, they want to know more.

That is why I am hoping for Liberal support. December 15 was not the first time the Prime Minister said he was open to the idea and was going to work on it. The Liberals have talked about this issue a lot in the past. In 2002, Mr. Caccia, the member for Davenport, introduced a similar bill. He was a Liberal government minister.

More recently, the Quebec wing of the Liberal Party of Canada passed a resolution at its convention. It was even one of the policy resolutions on the agenda at the Liberal Party of Canada's most recent convention in 2016. Unfortunately, it was not voted on.

● (1340)

I would have liked to see the results to know what Liberal Party members think. It is certainly an issue that has repeatedly come back to the table and has the support of Liberal Party members because they talked about it at their party's convention. I hope to have their support here.

I am also following in the footsteps of some remarkable MPs who have worked on this file. There was Alex Atamanenko, NDP member who represented the riding of British Columbia Southern Interior. He introduced a bill on this more than once. There was Judy Wasylycia-Leis, who represented the riding of Winnipeg North and also introduced bills as part of her work on this file. And let us not forget Paul Dewar, then hon. member for Ottawa Centre, who also worked on this issue and introduced bills. They were remarkable NDP MPs whose work we applaud and remember today.

As I was saying, the last time we addressed this issue and voted on it was in 2008, when we debated a Bloc Québécois bill introduced by Gilles Perron, the hon. member for Rivière-des-Mille-Îles.

Today, I am speaking to an issue that has been debated a few times in the House and that has been presented by different Canadian political parties.

I know my Conservative and Liberal colleagues, and I know what they will say. I therefore want to reassure them today that this is not an anti-GMO bill or an anti-GMO campaign. Far from it. It is simply a campaign to ensure transparency and provide people with more information. I want to be sure that members have clearly understood me: this is not a campaign against genetically modified foods. This bill will not prohibit the production of GMOs in Canada. This bill will not prevent technological research to improve our agricultural practices.

There is no way for this bill to be viewed as anti-GMO. It is simply a response to opinion polls that have been conducted in the past twenty years. These polls repeatedly and consistently showed that between 80% and 90% of Canadians support this initiative. Over time, the polls have consistently confirmed this support, including the most recent Health Canada survey, which also reported majority support for the labelling of GMO food.

My bill is very simple and includes only three provisions. The first stipulates that no person shall sell any food that is genetically modified unless it is labelled as such. Since I recognize the government's regulatory authority over food labelling, the second provision of the bill grants additional regulatory powers to define what constitutes a genetically modified food. The bill recognizes Health Canada's scientific expertise in this area, and so it is up to that department to define what constitutes a genetically modified food and determine when labelling is required. The bill also gives the government the regulatory authority to define the form and manner of labelling, where the label will be placed, and the size and wording of the label.

What is more, I am allowing the government to determine when the bill will take effect. If my bill is passed, the government can decide, after consulting the industry and hearing from all the stakeholders, when it would be best for Bill C-291 to take effect.

It is the simplest bill we have debated in the House. It has only three provisions and recognizes the government's current regulatory powers over food labelling. I therefore hope that the government will vote in favour of this bill, since 80% of Canadians support it.

● (1345)

I will be very disappointed if less than 80% of MPs support this initiative. That would be a blow to our democracy. I therefore encourage all of my colleagues to support Bill C-291.

Mr. Francis Drouin (Glengarry—Prescott—Russell, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his speech.

My question is about the government's role in labelling genetically modified products. As a member of the Standing Committee on Agriculture and Agri-Food, I learned that GMOs are not a health hazard. Companies are required to disclose health information. If this is not a health issue, is it really the government's role to get companies to label genetically modified products?

Mr. Pierre-Luc Dusseault: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague. He asked a valid question about health and the presence of allergens in food products, which is what led to labelling.

As he said in his speech, Health Canada uses industry research to decide whether to approve novel foods, as they are known in Health Canada jargon. Unfortunately, the big problem is that people do not trust the approval process. As my colleague pointed out, Health Canada relies exclusively on research paid for and carried out by industries that stand to gain from their products being approved. That is why the public does not have faith in the approval system.

My bill will restore some of that lost faith because people will have access to more information about the foods they are consuming. The information will at least be on the labels, which is a step in the right direction toward restoring public trust in the approval of novel foods in Canada.

Ms. Ruth Ellen Brosseau (Berthier—Maskinongé, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I sincerely thank my colleague from Sherbrooke for all his work, his bill, and his fight to ensure that there will one day be transparency in Canada's consumer labelling.

Canada has approved the sale of genetically modified salmon, but the salmon at the grocery store all look the same. That is why it is important to have mandatory labelling in Canada for genetically modified products, especially when we know that 80% of Canadians are calling for more transparency.

Can my colleague explain how this works in the United States? Some states require mandatory labelling of genetically modified products.

Mr. Pierre-Luc Dusseault: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for her support.

This is an opportunity to talk about something I did not have time to get to in my speech and that is the economic argument for my Bill C-291.

There has indeed been some progress in the United States. Today, some form of labelling is mandatory across the country. Some say the system is not perfect, but it is better than nothing.

We are in the process of signing a number of economic agreements with other countries, including the European Union. There is an economic reason for wanting to align our regulations with those of the 64 countries who already have mandatory labelling. Canada has some catching up to do.

From a trade perspective, the argument in favour of mandatory labelling is that it will allow us to align our regulations not only with our main economic partner, the United States, but also with our other economic partners around the world who have also made labelling mandatory, including the European Union with which we just signed a trade agreement. There is a very strong economic argument for Bill C-291.

I urge my colleagues to consider this important aspect of my bill.

Mr. François Choquette (Drummond, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague from Sherbrooke for all the work he has done on this file.

He recently came to Drummond to tell people about his bill and why it is important. I do not understand why the Liberals are questioning why we should label genetically modified food.

When we eat a food product, we know its salt and sugar content and we know what vitamins it contains. We have the right to know that information. The people of Drummond and of Canada have the right to know what they are eating. That is all we are asking. We want to know whether the food is or is not genetically modified. Then it will be up to the consumer to decide if they are going to buy the product.

What does my colleague make of the Liberals' argument, which I find quite puzzling?

● (1350)

Mr. Pierre-Luc Dusseault: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague from Drummond for his work on this issue.

I cannot understand why we would refuse to disclose this information, when this is being done in 64 other countries. Canadians are not second-class consumers. Canadian consumers have the right to this information as much as the consumers in these 64 other countries.

I do not understand why the Liberals and my other colleagues from all parties would reject such an initiative, which simply seeks to ensure that Canadians are on equal footing with consumers in these 64 other countries, where this information is available when they go shopping. I hope this information will finally be made available to Canadians.

Mr. Francis Drouin (Glengarry—Prescott—Russell, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, thank you for this opportunity to speak to Bill C-291. I understand its intention and why it was introduced, specifically, because consumers have the right to make informed decisions. However, today I want to talk about the unintended consequences of this bill.

Bill C-291 proposes to amend the Food and Drugs Act so that, once the regulations are in place, no genetically modified foods can be sold unless the label clearly indicates that the food has been genetically modified.

Canada does not currently require the labelling of genetically modified foods that have been approved following stringent scientific assessment by Health Canada, because those foods are as safe and nutritious as their non-GM counterparts. In Canada, companies may voluntarily choose to label genetically modified foods, provided the information is truthful and not misleading.

Let us be honest: this bill is calling for the mandatory labelling of genetically modified foods so that people will choose not to buy them. However, that choice will be based on misleading information. Going ahead with this will help perpetuate the myth that genetically modified foods are unhealthy, which is false. In fact, foods are no more safe or nutritious if they do not contain genetically modified ingredients.

I want to share some facts that consumers should be aware of. Genetically modified crops and foods are organisms whose inherited traits have been modified in part. This may involve genetic transformation, such as combining the DNA of corn plants with the Bt bacteria gene, which improves resistance to the corn borer, a harmful organism that attacks corn stalks.

This important technology reduces farmers' crop losses and eliminates the need for certain pesticides. Many varieties of field corn and sweet corn have this resistance gene. It not only helps farmers' harvests, it also helps reduce food waste.

Consumers should also know that we do not genetically modify organisms just because we can. We do it to help farmers deal with production problems and to provide innovative products to Canadian families. In short, this technology helps society.

The United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization recognizes the benefits of genetically modified food. It has indicated that crops are genetically modified so they can resist weeds, pests, and disease; improve their tolerance for poor weather conditions, such as frost, extreme heat, and drought; and increase crop yields, which can help to optimize land use and reduce the use of herbicides and pesticides.

Work is also being done to develop fruits and vegetables that stay fresh longer, which will help create new opportunities, reduce food waste, and improve the food supply worldwide. Plants and plant materials that can generate biofuel energy are also being developed. Work is also being done on other genetically modified organisms in order to rehabilitate damaged and less fertile land.

The main goal is to provide Canadians and the rest of the world with safe and nutritious food that is produced in an environmentally responsible way based on scientific fact. All food in Canada is regulated by Health Canada, which is responsible for establishing standards and regulations to ensure the safety and quality of all food sold in Canada, including genetically modified foods.

Genetically modified foods are already a safe part of Canadians' diet. Genetically modified foods have been approved by Health Canada and eaten by Canadians for years. No negative effects have every been reported, and these foods are just as safe and nutritious as foods that are not genetically modified.

Over 120 different genetically modified crops have been approved in Canada since the 1990s.

● (1355)

Genetic modification is recognized, in Canada and around the world, as a safe, effective, and more environmentally-friendly production method. Nearly 70% of processed foods sold in Canada already contain genetically modified ingredients. The most common processed ingredients are canola, corn, and soy. It is estimated that integrating genetically modified crops into Canadian farming activities increased our aggregate farm income by over $5 billion between 1997 and 2014.

Our goal is to feed Canadian families and meet international needs. As the global population increases, experts estimate that in 2050, we will have 10 billion people to feed, compared to 7.3 billion today. In its 2017 report entitled “The future of food and agriculture: Trends and challenges”, the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization, or FAO, stated that farm outputs need to increase by 50%.

The report reveals that we need to invest more in agriculture and agrifood systems, as well as research and development, in order to promote innovation, support sustainable production increases, and find better ways to cope with issues like resource scarcity and climate change. Genetically modified crops are part of those innovations. The use of genetically modified plants that are more tolerant to herbicides has helped improve soil health and even helped ease climate change, since this reduces the number of tractor passes needed in the field and means better carbon sequestration in the soil.

Let us come back to the issue of labelling. As I said earlier, mandatory labelling could mislead consumers. Making it mandatory to list genetically modified ingredients could be seen as a warning that the safety of the food is unknown. Not only will mandatory labelling of genetically modified foods not improve consumers' understanding of the issue, but it could have unintended consequences that consumers should be aware of.

Negatively influencing consumers' perceptions of these foods could reduce the productivity and safety of the global food supply because there would be less food if we relied solely on non-GMOs. There could also be harmful consequences for the environment because of the increased use of pesticides and herbicides to protect traditional crops. Finally, it could reduce investment in innovation that has the potential to support the long-term viability of the Canadian agriculture and agri-food sector.

We have already put in place strict and effective regulations. We have already put in place a rigorous framework that requires detailed and comprehensive assessments by Health Canada and the Canadian Food Inspection Agency. We have already put in place a national standard for the voluntary labelling of genetically engineered food.

In the interest of maintaining the health of Canada's economy and agricultural industry and considering that the consumption of genetically modified food poses absolutely no health risks, the government will not be supporting private member's Bill C-291.

I thank my honourable colleagues for their attention in this matter.

● (1400)

[*English*]

Mrs. Kelly Block (Carlton Trail—Eagle Creek, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is my pleasure to rise in the House today to speak to Bill C-291, an act to amend the Food and Drugs Act, genetically modified food, put forward by the NDP member for Sherbrooke.

For those of us who have been here for a while, this is an issue that we have debated before. In each Parliament, this bill, or some variation of it, comes forward. These bills never become law, because the majority of members recognize that Canadians are best served when the government limits itself to its core responsibility, which is ensuring that the food Canadians eat is safe.

Bill C-291 is very short. It proposes to amend the Food and Drugs Act to prevent any person from selling food that is genetically modified unless its label contains the information prescribed by regulations. However, the bill is unnecessary, and I will be opposing it for a number of reasons.

The first reason is that the present system is working well. The role that the government has taken, and should continue to take, is that of a regulator for the health and safety of food products and not that of a marketing agent.

Under the current regulatory framework, labelling is mandatory where the health and safety of a food product could be an issue. This responsibility extends to labelling for an allergen or in any situation where safety is a concern for susceptible people. An example of this would be labelling that indicates a product contains nuts so that those who are allergic have a warning prior to any problem arising.

Canadians enjoy the strongest standards of food quality and food safety. This is because of the consistent enforcement of clear rules that govern food safety. The bill before us would change all of that by expanding the role of the regulator beyond its core functions.

A second reason to oppose the legislation is that it aims to introduce a new component to the whole Canadian food safety regime. The bill proposes making the process of developing food the centre of our regulatory framework, rather than the monitoring of the safety of the food as it is now. Let us look at one example of how this would work, and coming from Saskatchewan, I do have to talk about canola.

Canola is now the country's largest crop. Our canola contributes $26.7 billion to our economy each year and is responsible for 250,000 jobs. It has revolutionized not just agriculture, but food preparation through an oil, which is seen as healthier than some of the alternatives. Canola oil has been used for decades, and there is no question that its quality benefits human health, feed, and biofuel feedstock.

Canola has been accepted as a healthy and safe food product for Canadians. It is not labelled in any way other than the typical ingredient breakdown we see on all of our food. However, most canola is GMO. When canola is processed into canola oil, the oil is identical whether it was from GMO or non-GMO canola. I will repeat that: the oil is identical. However, the bill would require that canola oil from GMO canola would be labelled differently from non-GMO oil, even though there would be absolutely no difference between the two.

The reality is that the main result of the bill receiving royal assent would be that the government regulatory framework would become a marketing tool rather than a judge of food safety. This is unacceptable, and it is one more reason not to support the bill.

Bill C-291 would also put the government in the position of legislating consumer choice. Consumer choice should be the role of the market and not the role of government. Companies need to make their own marketing decisions, and it is inappropriate for the government to be doing that for them. This is the position that our previous Conservative government took, and one that the current Liberal government should continue to hold to. Making GMO labelling mandatory would create an unnecessary and unwanted bureaucratic burden from the government on producers.

Food companies that want to indicate that their products do or do not contain GMO can do so. They are free to advertise as they choose, provided that their claims are true and not misleading. Those companies wanting to label their food GMO-free can put the spotlight on it. We see more and more of this taking place as consumers are demanding it. This is the proper way to handle GMOs and their labelling.

● (1405)

The choice to label is already in place. To make GMO food labelling mandatory would be to do the job of the market. We all know that for many Canadians, labelling of foods that have been derived from biotechnology is an important issue. This can and should be dealt with in the marketplace, as more people are making their shopping decisions based on it.

Retailers have a commercial imperative to provide the information consumers want when there is a demand. The standard in Canada for voluntary labelling of GE foods, entitled “Voluntary labelling and advertising of foods that are and are not products of genetic engineering”, has already been developed to address non-health and safety labelling.

The reality is that GMO foods are safe for people to eat. They are just as safe as non-GMOs. For decades they have been used by consumers, and the science has demonstrated that there is no evidence that GMO foods pose any danger to people. The overwhelming scientific consensus is that genetically modified crops and foods are safe; they are safe for use and consumption and pose no greater risk than conventional food.

Bill C-291 seems to imply that somehow GM foods are less safe, and therefore need to be labelled differently, and that manufacturers might try to deceive consumers about the composition of Canadian food, especially food with GMO content. The truth is that safeguards are already in place for the authenticity, approval, and sale of GM foods.

In Canada, GMOs are subjected to a rigorous evaluation for food, feed, and environmental safety before they ever get near the supermarket. Products that come to market have gone through testing, and because Health Canada employs a strict, rigorous pre-market assessment, we can be assured that new GM food products lacking adequate scientific data do not go to market.

Another reason to oppose Bill C-291 is that it proposes to amend the Food and Drugs Act to include a definition for genetically modified. This is unnecessary. The term “genetically modified”, or GM, is already defined in the food and drugs regulations under the novel foods section. It is also defined by Health Canada, the agency that regulates the food labelling responsibilities set out by the Food and Drugs Act. The requirement to define again that which is already defined only adds to the bureaucratic burden of the bill.

In conclusion, government needs to regulate food for safety. Providing the information that consumers demand, including whether a product has been genetically modified, and to what extent, should be the responsibility of the companies that produce and sell the products, not the government.

Mr. Richard Cannings (South Okanagan—West Kootenay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am happy to speak today to Bill C-291, a bill that would require the labelling of food products made from genetically modified organisms, or GMOs.

I want to start by acknowledging the work and mentorship of Alex Atamanenko, who served as MP for British Columbia Southern Interior for almost a decade. Mr. Atamanenko introduced bills that were very similar to this one in previous parliaments, and worked tirelessly in his time as MP for the farmers of Canada and for food security for all of us in this country. He was a very popular MP in the southern interior, and he has left big shoes to fill in my riding. I am sure he is very happy to know that his work is being carried on by the member for Sherbrooke. I tabled a motion on GMO labelling last year in this place, but I am happy that my colleague has taken forward this issue as a bill.

Why do we need GMO labelling in Canada? For one thing, it would bring us into line with regulations used by our major trading partners. The European Union requires GMO foods to be labelled, and the United States passed legislation last year to do the same. The current government and my Conservative colleagues are always promoting the value of harmonization of our regulations with the European Union and the United States. Here is a wonderful opportunity for them to get on board with more of that. These labelling regulations are in place in Europe and the U.S.A. because many people are concerned about GMOs and their effects on the environment, on their health, and on agricultural practices themselves. Much of the debate I have heard here has been about health. However, it is more than that. It is about other concerns that GMOs create when they are used in agriculture.

Labelling gives people the ability to make informed choices about the foods they eat and the agricultural practices these products support. Again, the Conservative member who preceded me talked about how people should be given a choice. That is what this bill would do. As the member for Sherbrooke said, this is not an anti-GMO bill; it would simply give people the right to know what they are eating. Many people have valid concerns.

There are some ecological concerns about GMOs. Most GMO crops, about 86% of them, are modified to be herbicide resistant. A previous Liberal debater said there would be less herbicide use if GMOs were not around. It is quite the opposite. Most GMO crops are called Roundup Ready. They can be sprayed with herbicides that kill every plant in the field except the crops themselves. This is a great idea from the farmer's perspective, but it allows the application of huge amounts of chemicals on farms across Canada.

Roundup and similar herbicides do not just kill weeds. The surfactant that allows the product to bind to the plants is highly toxic. It is deadly to amphibians and fish if it gets into water-filled ditches, ponds, and streams. There are some health concerns about Roundup as well. The World Health Organization recently classed its active ingredient, glyphosate, as probably carcinogenic. Health Canada, of course, has downplayed those concerns, because normal diets would only expose Canadians to about one-third of the daily dose required to cause problems. This directly points to the need for GMO labelling. Some people want to be able to make that choice.

There are also deep concerns from the public around the ownership of seeds from plants that individuals have grown. For most GMO plants, it is illegal or even impossible to use seeds from the crops that people grow to plant next year's crops. This fundamentally changes the age-old practice of many farmers, particularly those in developing countries, of saving the seeds they produce to grow the next year's crops.

There are also concerns from some growers in Canada about the risk to our national reputation as a producer of safe, healthy food if we do not tackle the GMO issue. The BC Fruit Growers' Association opposed the licensing of the GMO Arctic Apple because its markets depend on the trust its customers have in the apples we produce.

● (1410)

People buy apples because they are considered a tasty and healthy food, and any risk to that reputation could be bad news for Canadian orchardists.

As a scientist, I know that every GMO is different, and that the effects they might have on our environment and our health are different as well. I do not want to spend all my time here today debating those issues.

I can say that views about GMO effects are very polarized out there, with many people believing that all GMOs are evil and many believing that they are universally harmless and beneficial. As in almost every debate, the truth is somewhere in between. However, it is hard to get at that truth when much of the data from studies around GMO effects are hidden from public view. One thing I would ask is for the government to adequately support Agriculture Canada's research programs in this field and ensure that Canadians are well informed on the issues.

My father worked in an Agriculture Canada research station throughout his career, and I am well aware of the great benefits the work of our scientists have for the citizens of this country, from help to farmers in producing better crops with higher yield, to creating new products, and planning for a future with a changing climate.

I think that Agriculture Canada and Health Canada could play central roles in rebuilding trust in the science behind food safety. Too many Canadians have simply lost all trust in reports they hear about that subject when most or all of the studies have been carried out by large multinational companies that have a huge financial stake in the outcomes and interpretation of those studies.

How do Canadians feel about GMO labelling? Health Canada reports that almost 80% of Canadians want GMO products to be labelled, and about the same number of Canadians feel that voluntary labelling does not work. The will of Canadians could not be clearer. They want GMO labelling. They want this bill to be passed.

This bill bends over backwards to give industry and the government full discretion in how labelling is introduced, what it would look like, and even the actual definition of what is or is not a GMO product. Members simply cannot argue that it is too prescriptive or restrictive. This bill is about transparency.

GMO labelling is a first step that would help diffuse the polarization in the GMO debate in this country. It would allow Canada to join the rest of the world in giving its citizens a clear choice about what they eat and, as the Prime Minister put it last year, "know more about what they are putting in their bodies".

I would like to finish by thanking the member for Sherbrooke once again for bringing this bill forward. I once again thank Alex Atamanenko for his work in my riding and across Canada.

I trust all members will vote for this bill and give Canadians the GMO labelling and the choice they want.

● (1415)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Joël Lightbound (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Health, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, first of all, I want to thank the hon. member for Sherbrooke for calling the attention of the House to this very important issue, and I thank him for the work he put into his bill.

[*English*]

I think I can safely speak for all of us when I say that Canadians are informed consumers and it is important that they remain so. This includes having information on food labels when there are health risks and, equally, not having potentially confusing label information when health risks do not exist.

There are more than 105 million meals prepared and consumed every day in Canada. Canadians deserve to be able to trust the food they eat. We can all agree on this. However, where some may disagree is on whether a mandatory labelling declaration of “genetically modified” or “GM ”should apply to certain food.

[*Translation*]

Our government believes that Bill C-291, an act to amend the Food and Drugs Act, genetically modified food, is not the way to go. The bill does not align with the government's role to improve the health and safety of all Canadians and to better protect consumers from fraudulent practices.

I studied law. I see things through the eyes of a lawyer, which involves conducting a thorough analysis before making a decision. I will then present the information that is pertinent to this debate.

What does “genetically modified” mean? First, genetically modified food is not merely food that has been genetically engineered. Genetically modified food is simply food derived from an organism that has had modifications made to some of its genetic traits.

[*English*]

It can involve using chemicals or radiation to alter the genetic makeup of an organism's cells in a process called mutagenesis used, for example, to develop varieties of Canada's world-renowned canola. It can also involve joining DNA from two different species to produce new genetic combinations that are of use in agriculture, such as those used to develop Canada's groundbreaking, non-browning Arctic apple.

All food is regulated by Health Canada, which is responsible for establishing standards for the safety and nutritional quality of all food sold in Canada, and by the Canadian Food Inspection Agency, CFIA, which enforces those standards. This includes GM food.

[*Translation*]

Once again, Canadians' health and safety is our priority, and we have a rigorous scientific review process to ensure that products are safe for humans, livestock, and the environment. It usually takes seven to ten years for a company to compile enough data from its research, development, and testing on a genetically modified food to be able to submit a request for pre-market approval to the Government of Canada.

The company must provide Health Canada with detailed information describing exactly how the product was developed. The information is then reviewed by Health Canada scientists who specialize in areas such as molecular biology, toxicology, chemistry, food science, and microbiology.

● (1420)

[*English*]

GM foods that have been approved by Health Canada are as safe and nutritious as their non-GM counterparts.

I also mentioned livestock. The Canadian Food Inspection Agency, the CFIA, evaluates and regulates all feed ingredients, including those derived from GM organisms, in the same manner that Health Canada assesses food for human consumption. Any feed ingredient that is new or has been modified such that it differs significantly from a conventional ingredient is required to undergo a pre-market assessment and approval before being allowed into the Canadian marketplace.

We use the term “novel” to define products with traits that were not previously available for sale in Canada, such as those products produced through genetic engineering. For example, some corn feed grown in Canada has been genetically modified to survive drought conditions. The CFIA works closely with Health Canada and Environment and Climate Change Canada to thoroughly assess that GM products are safe for food, feed, and the environment.

Let us talk about labelling, which is at stake here. Health Canada requires mandatory labelling for food products where clear, scientifically established health risks or significant changes to the nutritional qualities of the food have been identified and can be mitigated through labelling. For example, if there is an allergen present in food, it must be labelled to alert consumers. The rigorous scientific reviews conducted have shown us that GM foods approved for the Canadian market do not pose a health risk.

[*Translation*]

What is more, Canada already has a national standard for the labelling of genetically modified foods. This standard can be used when companies choose to make claims. The standard was developed following broad consultation with the industry and the public. The standard for the voluntary labelling and advertising of foods that are and are not products of genetic engineering was first adopted by the Standards Council of Canada in April 2004. This standard guides food manufactures that choose to make claims regarding genetically modified foods so that they meet the labelling requirements set out in the Food and Drugs Act and the Consumer Packaging and Labelling Act.

[*English*]

Products can be voluntarily labelled based on the national standard provided conditions are met and the claim is understandable, informative, accurate, and not misleading. The CFIA is responsible for enforcing these labelling requirements. The decision of whether or not to proceed with voluntary labelling rests with the company.

I mentioned earlier how our laws need to reflect the sound science that we use for decision-making in Canada. Given that science supports genetically modified foods as being as safe and nutritious as their conventional counterparts, and the fact that voluntary labelling measures are already in place, the government will not be supporting Bill C-291. Having said that, the Government of Canada will closely monitor developments on this particular file south of the border. Since the U.S. and Canada have traditionally adopted a similar voluntary approach, we are closely following the development of the mandatory disclosure rule in the United States, and will participate in any public consultation process. Once the details of the U.S. government's direction on this issue are better understood, the Government of Canada will be better positioned to assess whether changes should be considered to better align with the new U.S. approach.

In addition, the CFIA and Health Canada are consulting with Canadians on food labelling, including discussions on a new approach for claims made on food labels. The Canadian government agrees with the need for transparency in the regulatory system, and is committed to providing Canadians with useful and timely information.

Ensuring the safety, quality, and the integrity of Canada's food supply is a top priority for our government. Canada has one of the safest, most affordable, and most abundant food supplies in the world. That is due in no small part to our science-based regulatory system.

● (1425)

[*Translation*]

In closing, I would like to once again thank the member for Sherbrooke for raising this issue in the House and drawing members' attention to it, even though the government does not support this bill. I wish him all the best.

[*English*]

Mr. Matt Jeneroux (Edmonton Riverbend, CPC): Mr. Speaker, It is my pleasure to rise in the House today to speak on Bill C-291, an act to amend the Food and Drugs Act, genetically modified food, put forward by the NDP member for Sherbrooke, Quebec.

The issue of genetically modified food has been debated in the House many times over several parliaments. Each time it comes before Parliament this bill, or a variation of it, our answer is always the same. Canadians are best served when the government limits itself to what it should, and that is issues of food safety.

The bill proposes to amend the Food and Drugs Act to prevent any person from selling food that is genetically modified unless its label contains the information prescribed by regulations.

The bill also proposes to amend subsection 30(1) of the act by adding the following after paragraph (b):

> (b.1) defining the expression "genetically modified";
>
> (b.2) respecting the labelling of genetically modified food, to prevent the purchaser or the consumer of the food from being deceived or misled in respect of its composition;

This bill is unnecessary, and I will be opposing it for a number of reasons. The first reason is that our current regulatory system is already working well. The role that the government has taken in the past, and should continue to take, is to be the regulator of the health and safety of food products.

Under the current regulatory framework, labelling is mandatory where the health and safety of a food product is an issue. Regulation extends to labelling for an allergen or situation where safety is a concern for people. If someone has an allergy to peanuts, for example, they would know not to buy a product containing peanuts at the grocery store because there would be a label indicating the presence of peanuts. Labelling for health and safety is mandatory and are the parameters of Health Canada and the Canadian Food Inspection Agency.

Canada has some of the safest food in the world because of the application of our consistent food and safety regulatory system in Canada. However, the member opposite seems to think that the genetically modified presence in a food must be labelled because the public deserves to know what might be a threat to human health. The reality is, GMO foods are safe for people to eat. They are just as safe as non-GMOs. For decades, they have been used by consumers and the science has demonstrated that there is no evidence that GMO foods pose a danger to people. In fact, the scientific consensus is that genetically modified crops and food are safe for use and consumption, and pose no greater risk than conventional food.

Health Canada and the CFIA note that after 20 years of GMO for animal food and human consumption there has been no evidence of harmful effects on humans. This is due to the fact that Health Canada has stringent standards examining data submitted from industry about new GMO products and evaluates them according to international standards.

GM foods have been consumed safely as part of our diets for decades, and it would be both impossible and unnecessary to label every genetic trait. Take a certain aesthetic quality of a GMO apple for example. Accepting this bill would require that apple to be labelled. Where does it stop? The bill does not say.

There is adequate science to prove that a GMO food is no different in its composition than a non-GMO food. Canola, for example, the country's largest crop, contributing to $26.7 billion to our economy annually and producing approximately 250,000 jobs, has revolutionized agriculture and food preparation through oil, which has been seen as a healthy and safe alternative to other oils. When canola is processed into canola oil, the oil is identical whether it was from a GMO or not. There is absolutely no difference between the two. This is why if one walks down the aisle of the supermarket, one will not see a difference in the way it is labelled either.

GMO has resulted in positive gains in agriculture as well. The plant biotechnology industry, for example, is a global, research-based industry with significant amounts of capital and time invested into the discovery, development, and regulatory approval of a wide variety of products of plant breeding innovations. These innovations have produced new varieties of crops that are resistant to insects, diseases, drought, and certain herbicides. These genetic traits deliver more predictable yields for farmers, improve crop quality, and encourage more environmentally sustainable farming practices.

● (1430)

Genetically engineered crops are valuable tools for farmers that have been adopted around the world on over two billion hectares of farmland.

Another reason this bill should be opposed is that it is a bureaucratic burden on our trade and regulatory processes. Most of our GM crops are exported. Would GM foods that we import need to be labelled as well? The bill leaves this unanswered. I would argue that adding an additional layer of red tape in our regulatory process would hinder our ability to be ideal trade partners.

Making GMO labelling mandatory would be an unwanted bureaucratic burden on our regulatory process as well. Approving the bill would turn the current government's regulatory framework into a marketing tool rather than a judge of food safety. This is not acceptable and is one more reason not to support it.

Companies should make their own marketing decisions. It is inappropriate for the government to be doing it for them. This is the position our previous government took and is one the government should continue to hold to.

For many Canadians, labelling of foods that have been derived from biotechnology is an important issue. This can and should be dealt with in the marketplace, as more people are making their shopping decisions based on it. Retailers will provide the information consumers want when there is a demand. The standard in Canada for voluntary labelling of GE foods, entitled "Voluntary labelling and advertising of foods that are and are not products of genetic engineering", has already been developed to address non-health and safety labelling.

Companies that want to indicate that their product does or does not contain GMOs are free to do so. They can advertise as they choose, provided that their claim is true and not misleading. Those wanting to label their food as GMO-free can put the spotlight on it. We see more and more of this taking place, as consumers are demanding it. That is the proper way to handle GMOs and labelling and is far better than what the bill would create.

Bill C-291 seems to imply that manufacturers might try to deceive consumers about the composition of Canadian food, especially food with GMO content. The truth is, safeguards are already in place for the authenticity, approval, and sale of GM foods. In Canada, GMOs are subject to a rigorous evaluation for food, feed, and environmental safety before they ever get near the supermarket.

CropLife has said that it takes typically seven years to bring a GMO product to market. That is from the lab to seed, and it could take about $150 million. This is a lot of time and money that should itself deter anyone from trying to mislead the public. Products that come to market have also gone through strict, rigorous pre-market assessment and testing by Health Canada. We can be assured that new GM food products lacking adequate scientific data do not go to market.

Bill C-291 does not outline what resources would be required to implement the mandatory labelling of GM food, nor does it talk about how, or when, it would be implemented.

Another reason to oppose this is that it proposes to amend the Food and Drugs Act to include a definition for genetically modified. This is unnecessary. The term "genetically modified" is already defined in the food and drugs regulations under the novel foods section. It is also defined by Health Canada, the agency that regulates the food labelling responsibilities set out by the Food and Drugs Act. The requirement to define again that which is already defined would only add to the bureaucratic burden of the bill.

There is a cost to the bill that is completely undetermined at this time. What is it going to cost to implement the mandatory labelling scheme that would be necessary to satisfy this bill? We have no way of knowing.

Given the safeguards in place, one must ask whether it is fiscally prudent for the government or members to support the bill. The answer is clearly no. The government needs to regulate for food and safety, but consumer choice should be the responsibility of the companies that make the products, not the government. The government should not have to do this for them.

[*Translation*]

The Deputy Speaker: 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.

It being 2:35 p.m., the House stands adjourned until Monday, March 20 at 11 a.m., pursuant to Standing Orders 24(1) and 28(2).

(The House adjourned at 2:35 p.m.)

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