



CANADA

House of Commons Debates

VOLUME 145 • NUMBER 029 • 3rd SESSION • 40th PARLIAMENT

OFFICIAL REPORT
(HANSARD)

Tuesday, April 20, 2010

—
Speaker: The Honourable Peter Milliken

CONTENTS

(Table of Contents appears at back of this issue.)

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Tuesday, April 20, 2010

The House met at 10 a.m.

Prayers

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

• (1000)

[*English*]

COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

CITIZENSHIP AND IMMIGRATION

Mr. David Tilson (Dufferin—Caledon, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the third report of the Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration in relation to the citizenship guide.

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ROYAL CANADIAN MOUNTED POLICE ACT

Mr. Claude Gravelle (Nickel Belt, NDP) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-514, An Act to amend the Royal Canadian Mounted Police Act (lump sum).

He said: Mr. Speaker, I am honoured today to table my private member's bill.

RCMP officers put their lives in danger in the service of Canada and no amount of money to their beneficiaries could ever compensate for their loss but a payment of \$300,000 would at least ensure that these families are not left in a vulnerable financial situation while they deal with their grief.

This bill would also ensure payment is made to the beneficiary of every officer killed in the line of duty irrespective of their time in service.

I also wish to point out that this bill is consistent with one of the key priorities of members of the Canadian Police Association who are on the Hill this week to bring their concerns directly to parliamentarians.

My colleague from Vancouver Kingsway is pleased to second this bill.

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

PETITIONS

AIR PASSENGERS' BILL OF RIGHTS

Mr. Jim Maloway (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have two petitions to present to the House today.

The first petition is signed by thousands of Canadians who are calling on Parliament to adopt Canada's first air passengers' bill of rights, Bill C-310, which would compensate air passengers travelling on all Canadian carriers, including charters, anywhere they fly in the world.

The bill would provide compensation for overbooked flights, cancelled flights and long tarmac delays. It addresses such issues as late or misplaced baggage. It would require all inclusive pricing by the airlines in all of their advertising. Airlines would need to inform passengers of flight changes, delays or cancellations. The new rules must be posted in the airport and airlines must inform passengers of their rights and the process to file for compensation.

If the airlines follow the rules, it will cost them nothing. In fact, legislation of this type has been in Europe for over five years. Why should Air Canada passengers be treated better in Europe than they are in Canada?

The petitioners call upon the government to support Bill C-310, which would introduce Canada's first air passengers' bill of rights.

• (1005)

EARTHQUAKE IN CHILE

Mr. Jim Maloway (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the second petition is signed by dozens of Canadians calling on the Canadian government to match funds personally donated by the citizens of Canada for the victims of the Chilean earthquake.

On February 27, a huge 8.8 magnitude earthquake hit southern Chile and the Canadian Chilean community has mobilized itself and has been raising money non-stop since then. They keep asking why the Prime Minister does not give the same treatment to the victims of the Chilean earthquake victims as he did for the victims of the Haitian earthquake and match funds personally donated by Canadians to help the victims of the Chilean earthquake.

EMPLOYMENT INSURANCE

Mr. Mark Warawa (Langley, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have two petitions to present today. The first petition deals with medical benefits.

Routine Proceedings

The petitioners are concerned that a number of severe, potentially life-threatening conditions do not qualify for disability programs because they are not necessarily permanent, that the current medical EI benefits of 15 weeks do not adequately address the problem and that residents find themselves losing their homes and livelihoods while trying to fight these severe medical conditions.

They are calling upon Parliament to enact specific legislation to provide additional medical EI benefits to at least equal to maternity EI benefits.

ASSISTED SUICIDE

Mr. Mark Warawa (Langley, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the second petition is regarding counselling someone to commit suicide.

The petitioners state that people who experience depression and mental illness need to be protected by the law, that youth in Canada are just as vulnerable as youth from around the world, that predators are both encouraging and counselling suicide without penalty through the Internet and that predators can do this without fear of prosecution.

The petitioners call upon the House of Commons to enable the prosecution of those who encourage or counsel someone to commit suicide by updating the Canadian Criminal Code to reflect the new realities of the 21st century, and to fund educational programs that empower people who experience depression and mental illness and Canada's vulnerable youth to protect themselves from online predators and to find appropriate community support resources.

NORTH KOREAN REFUGEES

Mr. Peter Julian (Burnaby—New Westminster, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have a petition signed by hundreds of residents of Toronto, Richmond Hill and Thornhill, Ontario. All of these Canadians are calling upon the House of Commons and the Government of Canada to support my motion, Motion No. 383, and to vigorously participate in an international effort to push the Government of the People's Republic of China to ensure safe passage for North Korean refugees to South Korea.

As members know, the conditions in North Korea are absolutely appalling with famine and a brutal regime of thugs who persecute, torture and kill routinely the citizens of North Korea. Many North Korean refugees manage to escape North Korea and they are returned by the Government of China back to North Korea, back to certain death, torture and persecution.

These many residents of southern Ontario, hundreds of them, are calling upon the Government of Canada to push the Government of the People's Republic of China to ensure safe passage for all of those refugees from the torture, persecution and physical violence that they are victim to every day.

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QUESTIONS ON THE ORDER PAPER

Mr. Tom Lukiwski (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Question No. 123 will be answered today.

[Text]

Question No. 123—**Mr. Dennis Bevington:**

With respect to aviation security: (a) what are all terms of the agreement which Canada signed with Mexico, Brazil, Argentina, Chile, Panama, the Dominican Republic and the United States in Mexico City on February 17, 2010; (b) what steps will be taken to ensure the personal information of Canadians shared with these countries is protected and not used for any other purpose; and (c) when will this agreement be presented to Parliament for review and debate?

Hon. John Baird (Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the response is as follows: a) On February 17, 2010, Ministers and high-level officials from Argentina, Brazil, Canada, Chile, United States, Mexico, Panama and Dominican Republic, jointly with the Secretary General of the International Civil Aviation Organization, ICAO, issued a joint declaration recommending that States, in collaboration with ICAO and pursuant to international law and domestic law, regulations and programs, establish procedures to strengthen their capacities to assess and face civil aviation security risks and threats, thereby facilitating legitimate passenger and air cargo flows.

To this end, governments represented in the meeting signaled their intent to promote the implementation of measures to strengthen travel document security, passenger screening procedures and biometric information, to broaden existing cooperation mechanisms, to share best practices related to civil aviation, and to utilize modern technologies to detect and prevent the carriage of prohibited materials.

Furthermore, attending governments aim to systematically collaborate within ICAO with a view to convening both international expert and intergovernmental meetings to agree upon actions in the following fields: aviation security standards, information exchange, research and development, and international cooperation.

b) Canada has not committed to sharing any personal information through this joint declaration. Plans for any future information exchange mechanisms will be developed with full respect for all domestic laws on protection and confidentiality of personal information.

c) By signing this declaration of intent, the Government of Canada has simply reconfirmed its long-standing commitment to the continued strengthening of global aviation security, through cooperation with other like-minded member states of the United Nation's International Civil Aviation Organization.

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[English]

QUESTIONS PASSED AS ORDERS FOR RETURNS

Mr. Tom Lukiwski (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, if Questions Nos. 80, 81 and 90 could be made orders for return, these returns would be tabled immediately.

The Speaker: Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

*Business of Supply***GOVERNMENT ORDERS**

[Text]

Question No. 80—**Ms. Jean Crowder:**

With regard to Indian and Northern Affairs Canada (INAC) staffing levels and use of contracts for each fiscal year since 2004-2005: (a) what is the total number of staff employed at Headquarters, full time and contract; (b) what is the total number of staff employed in each of INAC's Regional Offices, full time and contract; (c) what is the total number of staff employed by INAC organization, directorate and sector; (d) what is the total number of contracts awarded, their value, contact persons and the names of those organizations that received contracts all broken down by both province and constituency, and whether the contracts are for goods or services; (e) in detail, what was each contract awarded for; (f) was the contract tendered or sole-sourced; (g) in the case of a sole-source contract, was it approved by a minister and, if so, which minister approved it; and (h) in the case of a tendered contract, what is the number of tenders put forward and the length of the tender period?

(Return tabled)

Question No. 81—**Ms. Jean Crowder:**

With regard to Human Resources and Skills Development Canada and their Social Development Partnerships Program (SDPP): (a) which organizations have received funding over the last three years; (b) in the latest distribution of funds, what percentage of funding went to each province and how was that distribution determined; (c) what are the criteria for deciding what organizations are funded; (d) how much funding has been given to each federal riding over the last three years; and (e) why was there a budget cut for SDPP in 2006 and how has that affected the funding of new programs and the renewal of funding for current projects?

(Return tabled)

Question No. 90—**Hon. Carolyn Bennett:**

With respect to the Expert Review Panel on Medical Isotope Production: (a) what were the criteria and rationale to choose the four members of the panel; (b) who declined to sit on the panel; (c) how many times did the panel meet; (d) who did the panel consult; (e) what was the formal mandate of the panel; (f) did the panel have the technical expertise alone to be able to understand the proposals and make recommendations; (g) what is the relation of Dr. Alexander MacEwan, the Special Advisor on Medical Isotopes to the Minister of Health, to the panel; (h) did the panel recommend to the Minister that she implement the four recommendations of the Canadian Association of Nuclear Medicine mentioned at the November 23rd meeting of the Standing Committee on Health; (i) what was the process for the panel to consult with provinces and territories; (j) did the panel consult and meet with each public and private consortium that made a submission to better understand the strengths and weaknesses of their proposal; (k) will the government release the 22 submissions on ideas for isotope supply that were received and reviewed by the panel; (l) what was the role of the firm SECOR in the production of the expert panel report; (m) who, from SECOR, was assigned to this task; (n) what were the recommendations of the panel's November 30th report to the government; (o) will the panel be dismantled or will it continue its advising role to the government following its November 30th report; and (p) what will be the outcome of the panel and the government's next steps including, but not limited to, recommendations to proceed with projects, funding recommendations, or another phase of evaluations?

(Return tabled)

[English]

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

The Speaker: Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

[Translation]

BUSINESS OF SUPPLY

OPPOSITION MOTION—REPRESENTATION OF QUEBEC IN THE HOUSE OF COMMONS

Mr. Pierre Paquette (Joliette, BQ) moved:

That the House denounce the fact that the government seeks to marginalize the Quebec nation by introducing a bill to decrease Quebec's political weight in the House, and that it affirm that Quebec Members of Parliament, who represent a nation, must hold at least 25% of the seats in the House.

He said: Mr. Speaker, I will be sharing my time with the member for Argenteuil—Papineau—Mirabel.

I would like to begin by saying how proud I am to rise in the House today to move the Bloc Québécois motion, because I feel that we are doing the work for which Quebecers have elected a majority of Bloc members to the House six times since 1993.

In 1993, 1997, 2000, 2004, 2006 and 2008, a majority of Bloc members were elected in Quebec to represent and defend the interests and values of the Quebec nation.

Today, we are opposing the Conservative government's Bill C-12, which is designed to further marginalize the Quebec nation in the House of Commons. This reduction in the Quebec nation's political weight in the House is completely unacceptable to Quebecers.

When the Canadian Confederation was created in 1867, Quebec held 36% of the seats. If Bill C-12 were passed, that proportion would decrease to 22.4%, which is less than the Quebec nation's current demographic weight within Canada. That is an unacceptable decline compared to Quebec's current representation of 24.3%.

This bill is a direct attack on the rights of the Quebec nation. That is why we are putting forward the following motion, which the Speaker already read, but which I will reread:

That the House denounce the fact that the government seeks to marginalize the Quebec nation by introducing a bill to decrease Quebec's political weight in the House, and that it affirm that Quebec Members of Parliament, who represent a nation, must hold at least 25 percent of the seats in the House.

This motion is our response to Bill C-12, which is the latest manifestation of a Conservative obsession. The Conservatives are almost aggressive in the way they keep introducing legislation to marginalize the Quebec nation.

Bill C-12 is the latest example of this obsession, but the government previously introduced Bill C-56 and Bill C-22, not to mention the ones it introduced to amend the terms of senators, in violation of the Canadian Constitution, which requires constitutional negotiations with the provinces, particularly Quebec.

The Quebec minister responsible for government affairs was very clear when he said that Quebec would never agree to unilateral changes, even to the Senate. We would like to see the Senate abolished, but that must be subject to constitutional negotiations. The government can open up this Pandora's box if it wants to, but it cannot act unilaterally. The House of Commons is not able to amend the current rules, particularly those governing the Senate.

Business of Supply

Bill C-12 is another example of the Conservatives' obsession. Every time the federal government has introduced such bills, the Quebec National Assembly has unanimously adopted a motion denouncing the Conservative government's actions and calling on the government to withdraw its bills. I have these motions here, and I think it is worth reading them.

Regarding Bill C-56, on May 16, 2007, the National Assembly unanimously adopted the following motion:

THAT the National Assembly ask the Parliament of Canada to withdraw Bill C-56, An Act to amend the Constitution Act, 1867, introduced in the House of Commons last 11 May;

Bill C-56 essentially had the same objective as Bill C-12: the political marginalization of Quebec.

Regarding Bill C-22, another example of the Conservatives' obsession with marginalizing Quebec's political weight, the National Assembly adopted the following motion on October 7, 2009:

THAT the National Assembly demand that the Federal Government renounce the tabling of any bill whose consequence would be to reduce the weight of Québec in the House of Commons.

The National Assembly unanimously spoke out against these two previous bills and called for the government to withdraw them, and we are sure that it will do the same thing with Bill C-12 as soon as it has the opportunity.

• (1010)

We want to align our motion as closely as possible with the last motion I just read, which was passed on October 7, 2009, so we will amend our own motion on this opposition day. The amendment will be presented by my colleague and friend, the member for Argenteuil—Papineau—Mirabel, to make it clear that it is out of the question for the Quebec nation to lose any political weight in the House of Commons. We want to maintain our current weight. However, we know that some members of the House indulge in intellectual dishonesty. I will not name names, but I do have several members—nine or ten at least—in mind.

Mr. Daniel Paillé: A lot more than that.

Mr. Pierre Paquette: I was thinking of Conservatives only, but if I were to add several Liberals, that number would go up. We want to make it perfectly clear that maintaining the current political weight refers to the relative weight of members representing Quebec in the House, which is 24.3%, not the absolute weight, which is 75 seats. I have heard some Conservative members claim that they are maintaining Quebec's weight because there will never be fewer than 75 seats. Clearly, they do not know how to count. If the Canadian nation gets 30 more seats, that will unquestionably reduce Quebec's relative weight in the House.

That is totally obvious to Quebecers and the Quebec nation. Of the Quebec members who have spoken to date in the House, 49 have condemned any reduction of Quebec's political weight. In the Conservative caucus, the token Quebecers, including the members for Lévis—Bellechasse and Beauce, have defended the indefensible. As token Quebecers, who do they really represent? They represent the Canadian nation, the Prime Minister and the Conservative Party.

Unfortunately, I have not heard from Liberal members, but I hope that they take this opportunity to speak up and ensure that Quebec's rights are upheld in the House.

Forty-nine members of the House spoke in favour of maintaining the current political weight, Quebec's relative weight, as did the 125 members of the National Assembly. That means that two-thirds of Quebec's elected representatives in both the House of Commons and the National Assembly condemn the Conservative government's proposal and call on it to withdraw Bill C-12. There is a very strong consensus in Quebec when it comes to this issue.

An Angus Reid survey taken April 7, 2010, indicated that 71% of Quebecers are opposed to Bill C-12. That is a very broad consensus; Quebecers are practically unanimous. Only 15% of Quebecers support the bill, and that number is approximately equal to the current Conservative vote. It is a very small number that continues to shrink.

It is understandable that all of Quebec wants Bill C-12 to be withdrawn and wants to keep Quebec from being marginalized in the House, especially given that the House of Commons recognized the Quebec nation in 2006. In fact, there are not 10 provinces and territories represented in the House, but two nations—Canada and Quebec. But Bill C-12 gives Canada another 30 seats and does not give Quebec a single one. This is completely unacceptable.

We have been recognized as a nation, so we need to be given the means to be heard. The current relative weight of Quebec's members must be maintained. If we simply took the demographic proportions into consideration, it is obvious that there would only be 75 of us in a sea of Canadian members who would be defending the interests of their nation, which is completely legitimate. But our voices would never be heard in the House.

However, proportionality is not the rule. If it were, Prince Edward Island would not have four members. Other factors come into play and the Supreme Court has said this many times. One of these elements, which is new, is the House's recognition of the Quebec nation in 2006.

It is unfortunate to see the Conservative members defending the indefensible, but again, they are simply the mouthpieces for their party, which has refused to make businesses under federal jurisdiction accept French as the working language and refused to adopt Quebec's integration model for newcomers. If the House does not acknowledge and pass this motion, Quebecers will have only one choice, that which the Bloc Québécois stands for, Quebec sovereignty. Then we would have 100% of the power, not the 24.3% that the Conservatives are proposing, but 100% of the power to make our own laws.

• (1015)

[English]

Mr. David Tilson (Dufferin—Caledon, CPC): Madam Speaker, I can honestly say, and I hope most people in the House will say the same thing, that we in this country, and people in most democratic countries on this globe, believe in representation by population.

Business of Supply

That is what the motion is all about. My colleagues from the Bloc are trying to say it is something else. It is not something else. It is all about creating fairness in this country. If it is left the way it is, it is not fair for at least three provinces: Ontario, Alberta and British Columbia. It continues to be fair for the province of Quebec, notwithstanding what my friend from the Bloc Québécois has said.

The population of Quebec is currently 7,841,400. The population of the province of Ontario, the province in which my riding is located, is almost twice that, 13,374,700. The seat allocation for those two provinces will be 75 for Quebec and 124 for Ontario. That is based on representation by population.

Does my friend believe in the principle of representation by population or does he not?

• (1020)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre Paquette: Madam Speaker, there is the finest example of the fiction of Canadian Confederation. It is not provinces that are represented in this House, but nations. The Quebec nation has the right to its political weight. It is false to say that we have representation by population in this House.

I mentioned that Prince Edward Island has four members in this House when that province has the population of a large neighbourhood in Montreal. We know that other reasons were taken into consideration and we are arguing that recognition of the Quebec nation be a similar reason for maintaining our political weight because of what it represents.

We are not opposed to adding 30 seats to the Canadian nation. They can divide them up as they wish. That is their problem. However, we must maintain our political weight. That means that if 30 seats are added, Quebec must be given additional seats to maintain its representation at 24.3% of this House.

This is so obvious to everyone in Quebec. The member for Hochelaga corrected me. I said more than two thirds, but he did the math, which shows that 87% of elected representatives from Quebec, whether they sit in the House of Commons or the National Assembly, are opposed to Bill C-12 and are asking that Quebec's political weight be maintained.

Mr. Brian Murphy (Moncton—Riverview—Dieppe, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I have a few questions I would like to ask the member with regard to the question raised by the member from Ontario. I believe it is important to recall the history of this country. When Canada was founded, there were four provinces: New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, Quebec and Ontario. At the time, it was clear that other provinces could join. However, the country was founded with those four provinces.

I would like to ask the member if it is important to highlight and remember the fact that this country was founded by four provinces, with the sensibilities, ideas and hopes of that era and with rights that would be preserved through the years.

[*English*]

Does the member think that the idea of proportional representation means that our territory should have no MPs whatsoever, maybe half an MP, or a quarter of an MP?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre Paquette: Madam Speaker, the hon. member is arguing himself that we must take something new into account and that is the fact that the House of Commons has recognized that the Quebec nation exists and that the basis of discussion can no longer simply involve provinces. It has to be between nations. The point we are making is that in order to be heard, the Quebec nation needs to have the same political weight in the House that it has right now.

I want to remind the hon. member that things have evolved. When Upper Canada and Lower Canada joined to form a united Canada, Lower Canada, which was most of the region of Quebec, had agreed to equal representation between the two regions even though the population of Upper Canada was smaller. This was agreed to. What is more, at that time we were the Canadians. We became French Canadians and now we are Quebecers. We have a House of Commons that has recognized the existence and the political reality of this nation and that must be reflected—

• (1025)

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Denise Savoie): Resuming debate. The hon. member for Argenteuil—Papineau—Mirabel.

Mr. Mario Laframboise (Argenteuil—Papineau—Mirabel, BQ): Madam Speaker, I am pleased to speak to this excellent motion moved by the hon. member for Joliette, who is our House leader.

It is quite interesting to listen to the debates in this House and to hear the Conservatives and the Liberals ask our House leader questions. These two parties have been in power throughout Canada's entire existence.

I would like to go over a bit of history with them because it is not true that representation in this country has been based on population. I will provide the dates. In 1931, Quebec had 27.7% of the population and 26.53% of the seats; in 1941, it was 28.96% of the population and 26.53% of the seats; in 1951, 28.95% of the population and 27.86% of the seats; in 1966, 28.88% of the population and 28.03% of the seats and in 1976, 27.12% of the population and 26.6% of the seats. Accordingly, from 1931 to 1976, Quebec's population was proportionally larger than the number of seats it had in this House. My colleague also said that when the British North America Act was ratified, Lower Canada and Upper Canada were represented proportionally.

Today, the Conservatives have, for purely partisan reasons, decided to change the way things are. Tom Flanagan, their guru, makes no secret of it. The way the Conservatives might come to power with a majority is to decrease Quebec's relative weight by increasing the number of seats in the rest of Canada. That is the reality.

Business of Supply

Today, we are defending the rights of all Quebecers because there is a political party that has decided, for purely partisan reasons, to change the way things are in that country. It is their country. They can do what they want with their country. Just now, the hon. member said it well: if they want to increase the number of seats, they can go ahead, but they have to maintain the proportionality and the representation of Quebec. Why? Because the National Assembly unanimously wishes to protect that representation. That is why I will introduce an amendment. But, at the moment, we consider that Quebec currently having 24.3% of the seats shows fairness and respect for the nation of Quebec. What good is it for the Conservatives to recognize the nation of Quebec if, as soon as they get the chance, they want to reduce its political weight in this House? That is the harsh reality.

Earlier, the hon. member made reference to a poll that was conducted, not several years ago, but on April 7. The poll showed that 71% of Quebecers oppose a bill of this kind. What is worse, in Canada as a whole, 37% of the respondents came out in favour of the Conservative plan while 45% were against. The Conservatives have decided to defy public opinion for no other reason than that they want to protect or promote their own partisan politics. This is their way of governing and of achieving a majority in their country, by reducing the political stature of Quebec.

When we consider the positions taken by the Government of Quebec, we see that the National Assembly unanimously demanded the withdrawal of Bill C-56 that gave 26 seats to English Canada and none to Quebec. In other words, all the elected representatives of the nation of Quebec in the National Assembly, plus the 49 Bloc Québécois members of Parliament, that is, 87% of the all Quebec's elected representatives, both in the National Assembly and in the House of Commons, reject Bill C-56. The hon. member for Hochelaga did the calculations for us and he is a renowned economist who knows a thing or two about numbers.

I could quote the statement made by a constitutional expert, Mr. Benoît Pelletier, a former Liberal minister—clearly, he is no sovereignist—who laid out his position in a radio broadcast on May 17, 2007. He said:

I appreciate that the House is based on proportional representation. But I wonder whether there might be special measures to protect Quebec, which represents the main linguistic minority in Canada, is a founding province of Canada and is losing demographic weight. Why could Quebec not be accommodated because of its status as a nation and a national minority within Canada?

As I said, those are the words of Benoît Pelletier, the then minister responsible for international relations and relations with Canada.

•(1030)

Mr. Pelletier is a renowned constitutionalist and a staunch defender of Quebec's political weight.

The purpose of the motion that the House Leader of the Bloc Québécois introduced today is simple. All the Bloc Québécois wants is to protect Quebec's current political weight. We are not asking for anything new.

I gave the numbers from 1931 to 1976. With the population as the basis, we in fact had an under-representation of members. What we are asking all the parties in the House is to respect Quebec's political weight. It is simple. Its political weight is 24.3%. If you want to add

ridings in the rest of Canada, that is fine. But let us make sure that Quebec, too, gets more seats, so that it represents 24.3% of the members in the House. It is simply a sign of respect by one nation towards another. That is the reality.

Otherwise, the motion adopted by the House of Commons on the Quebec nation was nothing more than a show and yet another political manoeuvre. What is unfortunate is that the Conservatives, for better or for worse, did not take into account the fact that Quebecers see themselves as a nation. Obviously, they expect that to be reflected in more than just a title granted by the House of Commons during its proceedings, but to also be recognized in the legislation that the House passes.

That kind of recognition would mean above all that no bill would be introduced to change the number of ridings in the country without protecting the interests of the Quebec nation. The National Assembly of Quebec is asking unanimously that Quebec's political weight not be altered by this legislative change, pure and simple. That is the reality. History shows that Quebec agreed to have a different weight for its population. We know that some provinces have more members than they should based on the weight of their population. Throughout Canada's history, Quebecers have been good sports.

Now the Conservatives are coming at the numbers from a purely partisan angle. Tom Flanagan said that if they could get more members elected in Ontario and western Canada, they could win a majority, regardless of how Quebec votes.

On the surface, it seems that the Liberals are all too prepared to fall into the Conservative trap once again, also for purely partisan reasons. It is unfortunate. These are the only two parties that have ever governed this country. Of course they only care about their own political interests, rather than the interests of the people, and in this case, Quebec's interests.

There is no greater defender of Quebec's interests than the National Assembly of Quebec, which, through a unanimous vote, is calling on Ottawa to withdraw this bill because it reduces Quebec's political weight. It is appalling that a unanimous vote by the National Assembly is being so easily dismissed. This country will never move forward until Quebec becomes a country of its own and we can begin nation-to-nation business relations and harmonious relations as neighbours.

For purely partisan reasons, both the Conservatives and the Liberals are trying to manipulate things and fudge the numbers, to change the number of members in order to achieve a majority and win the next election, and have all the power to themselves. I have always said that politics can drive people crazy. Some are nearly there.

I would like to move, seconded by the hon. member for Laval, the following amendment:

That the motion be amended by deleting all the words after the words "in the House" and substituting the following: "and call on the government not to enact any legislation that would reduce Quebec's current representation in the House of Commons of 24.35% of the seats."

•(1035)

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Denise Savoie): This amendment seems to be in order. After hearing the sponsor, we can assume that he also agrees with the amendment.

Business of Supply

[English]

Hon. Steven Fletcher (Minister of State (Democratic Reform), CPC): Madam Speaker, let us talk about what is really being said here. The member from the Bloc Québécois has talked about the political weight of Quebec in our Confederation and in the House of Commons.

The hypocrisy is really self-evident. The member talks about politics. The politics of the Bloc Québécois is to take Quebec out of Canada. The Bloc members are advocating for Quebec to have zero seats in the House of Commons, zero.

Our party and the other federalist parties support Quebec being part of Canada. We guarantee that Quebec will always have 75 seats in the House of Commons. The Bloc is advocating for Quebec to have zero seats. That is point number one.

The other point I would like to raise is the member talks about Quebec's political weight. If Quebec wanted to add to its political weight with the 75 seats it has, it would be helpful if people in Quebec voted for a federalist party, be it the Liberals, the Conservatives or the NDP. As the member has pointed out, the Liberals and the Conservatives have tended to be in office for the majority of the time. If people in Quebec want additional political weight, they should vote for the Liberals or the Conservatives. They should not vote for the Bloc because that party wants Quebec to have zero seats in the House of Commons.

Canada is based on fairness. This is a principle-based formula that is fair for the people of Alberta, Ontario, British Columbia and right across the country. The Bloc has no credibility because that party wants nothing for Quebec when it comes to the House of Commons.

[Translation]

Mr. Mario Laframboise: Madam Speaker, when it comes to hypocrisy, the Minister of State for Democratic Reform is now the king. First, he says we are not seeking any seats. It is true that we would like to be a country and deal nation to nation. It is what we have always said. Today, our motion says that we want to keep Quebec's weight at 24.35%. We want to keep that representation. Perhaps his real political problem is that he has a hard time accepting the Bloc.

Like Tom Flanagan, he thinks that the only way to make the Bloc Québécois disappear or to achieve power is by giving more seats to the other Canadian provinces. This is the crass political reality of the Conservatives. That is what we are experiencing and having to endure, and that is what Quebeckers do not accept. Quebeckers do not accept crass Conservatives; they reject them and will continue to reject them especially since they are introducing that reform.

Once again, if the hon. member was the slightest bit open-minded, he would accept, not the recommendation of the Bloc Québécois, but the recommendation of Quebec's National Assembly, which asked through a federalist Liberal premier that this bill be withdrawn. So that means that he does not even listen to a member of the federation, to one of the provinces of the federation. It is a political choice, but once again, it is just crass conservatism.

● (1040)

[English]

Mr. Brian Murphy (Moncton—Riverview—Dieppe, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I have a question on the meaning of the amendment and will mention a couple of hypothetical situations.

Let us say the Maritime Union took hold and the Maritimes left Canada. Would Quebec, according to the member, be happy with 24.35% or more?

The second question I have is hypothetical but is not that much of a stretch. Quebec is doing immensely well on the world stage and could grow in leaps and bounds. Would the member envisage this motion if passed preventing Quebec from having more than 24.35% should it be the province to grow? Finally, would it be fair if Quebec had this spurt of growth, which we all think could occur, if it was held back in its number of seats by percentage?

[Translation]

Mr. Mario Laframboise: Madam Speaker, I provided numbers earlier. I would tell the hon. Liberal member that, from 1931 to 1976, Quebec had fewer members in the House proportional to its population. Quebeckers have always been good sports in the federation. The problem is that, today, for purely partisan reasons, the Conservatives and the Liberals are trying to have more ridings in Ontario and Alberta so that they can finally win a majority. It is a choice. Once again—

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Denise Savoie): Order, please. The hon. Minister of State for Democratic Reform.

Hon. Steven Fletcher (Minister of State (Democratic Reform), CPC): Madam Speaker, I rise to speak out against the opposition motion on representation in the House of Commons.

[English]

As the House knows, I introduced Bill C-12, the democratic representation act, on November 1, 2010. This important bill will restore fairness in the House of Commons. The motion before the House today would do the opposite. It would compromise the fundamental democratic principle of representation by population.

The issue of representation in the House is fundamentally important to Canadian democracy. As a democratic state we must strive to ensure representation in the House is fair and respects fundamental democratic principles.

In Canada, as in any other democratic society, the overriding principle must be representation based upon population.

First, representation should be based on the population. The Supreme Court of Canada has stated that relative parity of voting between citizens should be the primary consideration in democratic representation.

Business of Supply

While mathematical parity is impossible to achieve in a diverse country such as Canada, our government believes to the greatest extent possible we should strive to ensure each Canadian has equal weight when he or she votes. This means we should seek to correct any undue inequalities in the average population size of ridings in one province as compared to another. Where such inconsistencies exist, there must be a justifiable reason. This leads to the second principle of representation that we must keep in mind, which is effective representation in a federation.

Canada's 10 provinces vary widely in population, geographic makeup and demographic growth. Therefore, the primary principle of representation by population may need adjustment to ensure the voices of smaller provinces continue to be effective and they are not drowned out by larger ones.

[*Translation*]

Our bill guarantees that Quebec and all the other provinces will keep their seats.

[*English*]

We recognize it is important for the voices to be heard in this place, the national Parliament, and to some degree, the enhanced representation for the smaller provinces has always been accepted on that basis. Of course, because there is a finite number of seats in the House, the enhanced representation for some provinces will impact the representation for others. The question must always be the degree of the impact that is acceptable, keeping in mind the fundamental and primary principle of representation by population.

The third principle that must inform representation in the House is ensuring, on a forward-looking basis, that future growth in the membership of the House of Commons is reasonable. While it is often said that there is no unreasonable place for democracy, we must be mindful that unnecessary growth in the House will result in concrete costs to the public purse. The question becomes again: What is fair? What approach will recognize the population growth in certain parts of the country from one census to the next? What approach will ensure that Canadians living in provinces of rapid growth will receive fair representation?

We considered each of these principles while developing the democratic representation act. It was our duty, as the government for all Canadians, to bring a national perspective to this task. Indeed, this is a perspective that every member of Parliament, as a member of Canada's House of Commons, should bring to this issue. As I will explain shortly, we believe we have struck the right balance between competing principles, which will correct the unfairness of the existing formula for readjusting the seats in the House.

Let me talk about the current formula. The existing formula for readjusting seats was introduced in 1985. However, in light of demographic changes in the country, this formula is no longer adequate. Returning to the three principles I outlined, the 1985 formula does not strike a good balance. In short, it sacrifices the primary principle of representation by population for the other two and does so at the expense of faster growing provinces.

As a first step, the formula requires that each province, based on its population, gets a share of the 279 seats, which was the number of seats in the 33rd Parliament. As a second step, the 1985 formula

protects any province from losing the number of seats it had in the 33rd Parliament even if its population is in relative decline. This is known as the grandfather clause.

This is also in addition to the constitutional provision that prevents any province from having fewer MPs than it has senators, which is known as the senatorial clause. The effects of this formula have been profound. Simply put, the formula sacrifices the primary democratic principle of representation by population in favour of an arbitrary ceiling that is based on the size of the House of Commons three decades ago.

While this does constrain the size of the House, it does so at the expense of three faster-growing provinces alone, limiting the number of seats they can receive from one readjustment to the next. At the same time, the other seven provinces receive extra seats to maintain their seat counts under the 1985 formula. These extra seats further reduce the relative representation of faster-growing provinces that are already being penalized by the formula's ceiling. This will only worsen for Ontario, Alberta and British Columbia as each subsequent readjustment is done.

● (1045)

[*Translation*]

Accordingly, Ontario, Alberta and British Columbia have become extremely underrepresented in the House of Commons.

[*English*]

This means that faster-growing provinces have more populous ridings than slower-growing provinces. Based on the 2006 census, ridings in Ontario, Alberta and B.C. had, on average, more than 26,000 more constituents than ridings in slower-growing provinces. The voices of Canadians in Ontario, B.C. and Alberta are diminished each time the population of those provinces increases.

The next readjustment of seats is based on projections for the 2011 census. This number is projected to increase to almost 30,000. That is 30,000, with the average riding population of Ontario, Alberta and B.C. being about 120,000 constituents, obviously significantly more people than the average.

In short, the current formula is moving the House as a whole further away from the principle of representation by population and is also sacrificing effective representation of citizens in faster-growing provinces. Our government is taking a principled approach that strikes a balance between restoring fairer representation for faster-growing provinces and protecting the seat counts in slower growing provinces.

Bill C-12, the democratic representation act, would restore fair representation in the House of Commons and strike a better balance between the democratic principles I mentioned at the beginning of my remarks. First, the new formula would correct undue disparities in the average population of ridings in faster-growing provinces compared to slower-growing provinces.

Business of Supply

Bill C-12 would establish a maximum average riding population of 108,000 for the next readjustment of seats. This was approximately the national average riding population at the time of the last general election. This is significantly less than the average riding populations for these provinces under the current formula, which I mentioned would be more than 120,000 constituents per member or 30,000 more constituents on average. Put another way, it cuts in half the disparity in average riding size between slower- and faster-growing provinces compared to the current formula.

Bill C-12 ensures Canadians in faster-growing provinces will no longer feel their vote does not count as much as that of Canadians in other provinces. It brings the House much closer to the primary principle of representation by population.

At the same time, Bill C-12 would continue to ensure the second principle of democratic representation, that of effective representation. It would continue to protect the seat counts of slower-growing provinces. This means that the seven slower-growing provinces, including Quebec, would continue to receive more seats than their populations would otherwise merit. Bill C-12 would strike a reasonable and fair balance by ensuring all provinces continue to have a critical mass of seats necessary to ensure effective representation in the House.

What is more, Bill C-12 would adopt a fair and reasonable approach in limiting the overall growth in the House of Commons in subsequent readjustments. Under the proposed bill, the maximum average riding population of 108,000 that is used as the standard in the next readjustment following the 2011 census would be increased based on the overall rate of growth in the total provincial population.

Essentially, what this means is that provinces would only receive additional seats if their populations were growing more rapidly than the provincial average. This would ensure that future growth in the House is constrained but in a principled manner that recognizes population changes in the country.

As a whole, I believe it is clear that Bill C-12 is true to all three key principles of democratic representation. The bill would correct the problems with the existing formula that has moved us too far away from the primary principle of representation by population. The bill would provide fair and democratic representation in the House for all provinces, and yet it would ask for fairness.

• (1050)

The member for Joliette is asking the House to denounce Bill C-12 before it has even had a chance to be debated.

The motion before the House today simply wants a guarantee of 25%, or 24.3%, of the House's seats for the province of Quebec. Let us look at the proposal in the context of the three principles I have established for democratic representation.

First, this guarantee of a certain percentage of seats is not based on any measure of population at all and would in fact abandon the principle of representation by population in the House.

Let us consider the demographic context. This idea was proposed in 1992 in the Charlottetown accord at a time when, according to the 1991 census, Quebec's share of the population was actually over 25%. However, according to the 2006 census, Quebec's share of the

population has fallen. Based on currently available projections, the population of Quebec will unfortunately continue to fall to about 21.6% by the 2031 census. Even the current formula with all its distortions to the principles of representation by population is inadequate under the terms of today's motion.

Currently Quebec has 24.4% of the House seats if we include the territorial seats. After the next readjustment under the current formula it would have 23.8%. A guarantee of 25%, or 24.3% as the amendment said, would take us even further away from representation by population in the House.

Let us consider the second principle, effective representation, particularly for smaller provinces in the federation.

The only way to accept the member's proposition for a guaranteed percentage of seats in the House for Quebec is to take Quebec's actual share of the provincial population, which will be much less than that. It would take away representation from other provinces in Canada. Unless the member is actually suggesting we further aggravate the alarming under-representation of faster-growing provinces, this would include impairing the representation of provinces that are much smaller than Quebec.

It must be remembered that under both the current formula and the proposed formula in Bill C-12, Quebec is already receiving more seats than its population justifies to maintain its current seat count of 75. In comparison to Quebec's guaranteed 75 seats, the 6 smallest provinces have fewer than 15 seats each. That is less than one-fifth of Quebec's seats. I would challenge the member opposite to explain to the residents of these provinces that the effectiveness of their representation will not be compromised by today's motion.

Quebec also has 11 more seats than the medium-sized provinces of Alberta and B.C. put together. Yet, based on the 2006 census, Quebec has roughly the same population as Alberta and B.C. combined. If B.C. and Alberta are added together, Quebec has 11 more seats even though the population of the two provinces is greater. Nevertheless, the terms of the member's motion would ensure Quebec gets even more seats. This is not acceptable if we wish to have a democracy based on representation by population in the House.

Today's opposition motion accuses the government of marginalizing the Quebec nation by introducing Bill C-12, but this is not true. Bill C-12 seeks to restore fairness in representation for all provinces and all Canadians through a principled formula that will bring the House as a whole closer to representation by population.

Business of Supply

• (1055)

Quebec will continue to have its seat count protected and will receive extra seats if its population merits. These extra seats mean that the average riding in Quebec would continue to have fewer constituents than Ontario, Alberta and British Columbia. As we move forward, the number of constituents in the average Quebec riding will be fewer than the average seats in Alberta, British Columbia or Ontario.

• (1100)

[*Translation*]

On average, Quebec ridings have 2,000 fewer voters than ridings in Ontario. Protecting the number of seats also means that Quebec's relative importance in the House will increase over time.

From an objective point of view, Quebec will continue to have a major influence in the House because it will be the second largest province in terms of number of seats, to reflect the fact that it is the second largest province.

I would also like to remind the hon. opposition member that our government was the first to recognize that Quebec is a nation.

[*English*]

I understand the Bloc does not care if Ontario, Alberta or British Columbia are under-represented. The Bloc is only interested in Quebec. However, our government believes in working for all Canadians and believes that all Canadians should be represented fairly in the House of Commons.

It is interesting that the Bloc is asking for 25% or 24% of the seats in the House when for 20 years the Bloc has been fighting to bring Quebec down to zero seats in the House of Commons. The Bloc wants Quebec to have no seats in the House of Commons.

The other parties, particularly the government party, want Quebec to have 75 seats, a representative share in the House of Commons, because Quebec is a strong member of this great united country. Representation in the House must be guided by democratic principles that ensure fairness for all provinces.

Bill C-12, the democratic representation act—

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Denise Savoie): Order. Questions and comments. The hon. member for Burnaby—New Westminster.

Mr. Peter Julian (Burnaby—New Westminster, NDP): Madam Speaker, there are two issues here.

There is the issue of the quantity of representation. There is no doubt that British Columbia has been historically under-represented in the House of Commons. In this corner of the House we believe profoundly that this issue must be addressed. New Democrats have been very strong and prominent spokespeople in pressing both the former government and the current government to take action.

There is also the issue of the quality of representation. At one point the Minister of Finance stated that Canada ends at the Rockies. From the Conservative government we have seen the imposition of the softwood lumber sellout that killed thousands of jobs in British Columbia. It was absolutely appalling.

Most recently with the HST, we have seen another example of the lack of quality of representation from the Conservative Party. Conservative MPs from British Columbia are trying to impose the HST on British Columbians. We have seen how well that worked as 80% of British Columbians oppose the HST. There are lineups to sign the referendum initiative. British Columbians are united in their opposition to the Conservatives' imposition of the HST.

I wanted to ask the minister what the Conservative government will do to improve the quality of its representation in British Columbia? We have seen British Columbia Conservative MPs support the softwood sellout, HST, and a variety of broken promises to British Columbia. What are the Conservatives going to do to address the poor quality of representation by the Conservatives in British Columbia?

Hon. Steven Fletcher: Madam Speaker, I disagree with the premise of everything the member said.

I am going to focus again on Bill C-12 and the benefits that it brings to British Columbia. By allowing British Columbia to have the seats it deserves, the democratic will of the people of British Columbia will choose who will be their representatives in the House of Commons. I note that most of the time British Columbians choose Conservatives.

Having said that, more along those lines of effective representation, this motion comes from the Bloc. I can say that one member from the Conservative Party from Quebec has done more for Quebec in one day than the entire Bloc number of MPs, which is around 50, have done in the last 20 years. One Conservative member has done more for Quebec than the entire Bloc Québécois has done in its entire history. Therefore, if one wants effective representation, it would probably be a good idea to vote for a federal party even if it is the NDP which is sometimes effective.

• (1105)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Daniel Paillé (Hochelaga, BQ): Madam Speaker, I agree with the minister of state that we have what we deserve. That is exactly why the Conservatives are going nowhere in Quebec and why the Bloc Québécois is the party that does the best job at representing Quebeckers. I will point out to him that by refusing a unanimous decision of the National Assembly, he is refusing a proposal from the Premier of Quebec, who happens to be a former leader of the Conservative Party. Need I remind him that the current Premier of Quebec is a former leader of that bunch over there?

I would like to do some elementary math with the minister. Does he not understand that 75 out of 308 is 24.35% and that 75 out of 338 is less than that? If the Conservatives want to add 30 seats, then at least 8 of those 30 seats should be in Quebec. If they absolutely want to have those 30 extra seats for themselves, then they need to add 10 in Quebec. Does the minister not understand that 75 out of 250 is 30%, that 75 out of 308 is 24% and that 75 out of 400 would be 18%? Can he not understand this simple elementary math notion, namely that 75 out of something depends on the value of that something?

Business of Supply

I would like the minister to ask us how to solve this equation because I am sure that the Conservative members from Quebec cannot do this simple math.

[English]

Hon. Steven Fletcher: Madam Speaker, Canada is based on fairness, fairness from coast to coast. This formula ensures that provinces that have been under-represented will be fairly represented. Quebec will be well represented. It can even be better represented if one elects members from a federalist party. The Bloc Québécois does not care about Canada. It does not care about the federation. It wants to have zero seats in the House of Commons for Quebecers. We want Quebec to stay strong. We will protect the seat count of Quebec in Canada.

I would like to take a moment to reflect on the great contributions Quebec has made to Canada, to make our nation the greatest nation in the world—

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Denise Savoie): Order. The hon. member for Dufferin—Caledon.

Mr. David Tilson (Dufferin—Caledon, CPC): Madam Speaker, I would like to congratulate the Minister of State for Democratic Reform for explaining what this government is trying to do. It is kind of strange, as he said, because the government bill is going to be debated after this motion, which is sort of going at it backwards.

My question for the minister is similar to the one asked by my colleague from the Bloc. It has to do with the issue of the Bloc's initial motion, which is essentially that 25% will be for Quebec, the calculation seems to be that Quebec would get 88 seats. If we took the amendment, and I have no idea where that came from, that seems to be 24.3%. So it would be 85 seats for Quebec. Either way it would seem to me that it is going to create even more unfairness for the rest of the country.

That is what this is all about. It is creating fairness to representation by population as best we can in this very complicated country. I would like the minister to comment on the mathematics of the motion and the amendment.

• (1110)

Hon. Steven Fletcher: Madam Speaker, that is a very good question because if we follow the Bloc's logic, at least today, it would add a significant number of seats to the House of Commons, further creating a disparity. Faster growing provinces would be further under-represented.

We brought forward a very principle-based formula. Canadians at home can easily see where the numbers came from. They just have to take the population of Canada in the last election in 2008, which was about 33 million, divide it by 305 and they will get the number. That would be applied into the future. It is very fair and easily understood. There is none of the mathematical gymnastics that existed in the past.

In the past, the Bloc advocated for zero seats in the House of Commons, so I do not really understand where the Bloc is coming from. It wants seats; it does not want seats. It wants to be part of Canada; it does not want to be part of Canada. The fact is we want Quebec to have a strong voice in Canada and this government will ensure that continues.

Mr. Jim Maloway (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Madam Speaker, as the member knows, in Manitoba and certainly in the provincial legislature there is a system whereby there is a possible variation of 25%, I believe, to benefit the rural areas. That system has operated for many years without much acrimony at all. In terms of the system in Manitoba and with regard to the federal system, is there a variation to take into account the disparity in the rural areas?

Hon. Steven Fletcher: Madam Speaker, what the member is asking is: once the seats are allocated per province, how are they allocated within the province? There is another act called the Electoral Boundaries Readjustment Act where the seat boundaries are decided within each province and there is a plus or minus 25% mean difference in that readjustment. That issue can be dealt with within each province after the seats are allocated to the province.

[Translation]

Mr. Marcel Proulx (Hull—Aylmer, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I rise today in this debate on the joint motion of the Bloc Québécois and the NDP.

Before getting into debate, I would like to address a comment to my colleague, the Minister of State for Democratic Reform. He said, "Quebec we love you", and "Thank you Quebec", but perhaps his government should do something positive for Quebec instead of just saying nice things.

Before addressing the basic principle of our democracy—one person, one vote—I have to say that my colleagues from the Bloc are really trying my patience.

The Bloc Québécois members always try to poison discussions and have Quebecers believe that they are there for them. In my sense, that is not true. They make it clear that they want a sovereign Quebec and, to me, a sovereign Quebec means no seats for Quebec.

They are calling for more seats for Quebec, while at the same time wanting none. As I said, no seats for Quebec. That is hypocrisy. There is an old saying that you cannot have your cake and eat it too. Everyone knows that the Bloc does not want any seats for Quebec, be it in the House of Commons, in the Senate or in government. The Bloc states its objective honestly, but there is something hypocritical about putting forward a motion like the one before us this morning.

The Bloc Québécois leader toured the rest of Canada to meet Canadians and explain his blueprint to them. He was convinced from the start that it was a lost cause. Why did he undertake this tour if he was convinced from the start that it was a waste of time?

In an interview with a journalist from the daily newspaper *Le Devoir*, the Bloc leader expressed this negative mindset in these terms:

There is nothing that Canada can offer or change. Canada cannot be reformed. The federalists have said it themselves, "The fruit is not yet ripe" or "the soil is not fertile". We are not discussing this any more; it is over. The only solution for the Quebec nation is sovereignty. Quebec is not against Canada; it is even a good solution for Canada, instead of having these endless debates.

How generous.

Business of Supply

I have been told that I made a mistake in saying that this was a joint Bloc Québécois and NDP motion, since the Bloc amended its own motion and not the NDP. I will correct that and say that I am talking about the motion that has been entirely presented by the Bloc Québécois.

The only solution good enough for the Bloc is its own. It thinks that outside its own party, there is no salvation. However, the Bloc Québécois does not represent all of Quebec. Not every Quebecker supports sovereignty. Even the former leader of the Bloc Québécois, Lucien Bouchard, does not believe that he will see sovereignty in his lifetime. Quebeckers deserve much more. They deserve recognition and representation that reflect the important role they play in Canada.

The government has introduced Bill C-12, An Act to amend the Constitution Act, 1867 (Democratic representation). The Conservative government introduced a similar bill in the second session, before the Conservatives decided to hide from their problems and prorogue Parliament. Who can forget the famous prorogation?

This bill would amend the rules in the Constitution Act, 1867 for readjusting the number of members of the House of Commons and the representation of the provinces in that House.

Why is the Bloc so eager to pass a motion on representation in Quebec, when it knows very well that we will be discussing every single one of these issues during the debate on Bill C-12? The Bloc is using this forum to convince Quebeckers that it is the only party that knows the truth and that it is the only messenger.

• (1115)

They want to get political mileage out of it. Why, on their allotted day, are they not tackling the problems of concern to Quebeckers, like the economy, jobs, pensions, health care and employment insurance, among other things?

No, the Bloc is using this day it has been given to pursue its campaign strategy and not to advance the cause of Quebeckers. It is here to advance its own cause and its own very specific solutions.

We, the Liberals, want to advance issues that are important to Quebeckers and to Canadians, and we want to debate the entire question of representation in the debates on Bill C-12. We will participate actively in discussions about Bill C-12, and we will very probably vote in favour of the bill at second reading so it can be studied in depth in committee.

We, the Liberals, want to debate it on its merits and hear experts tell us about all the ins and outs of the broad principle of representation. It is an important but also very complex value that must be studied in its entirety. We must not limit the study to representation as it relates to Quebec. Canada is a whole, whatever the Bloc may think. What affects Quebec also affects all the other regions of Canada. We do not live in a vacuum. Our economy and our trade extend far beyond our borders.

I would now like to talk about the great democratic rights set out in the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. In particular, I would be remiss if I did not mention the right to vote. I would like to quote section 3 of the charter on the right to vote: "Every citizen of Canada has the right to vote in an election of members of the House

of Commons or of a legislative assembly and to be qualified for membership therein."

There is a fundamental principle in our democracy: one person, one vote. In a federation, that principle generally applies to the lower chamber. In Canada, the broad principle of one person, one vote is applied to the House of Commons. In a federation, regional interests are often represented in an upper chamber. In Canada, representation of regional interests is found in the Senate.

Under the Canadian Constitution, Quebec has 25% of the seats in the Senate. That is a constitutional guarantee.

We then have to ask whether the Bloc itself believes in its own motion. It was against the referendum on the Charlottetown accord. To the Bloc, there is only one solution: no seats for Quebec in the House of Commons, zero seats. In the Senate, Quebec has 25% of the seats. What is the Bloc proposing instead? Abolishing the Senate, which amounts to no seats, zero seats, for Quebec in the Senate.

Every election, the Bloc fights to have Quebec ultimately get no seats in government. Zero seats.

I reject this fake indignation, this playing at having their delicate sensibilities offended, that the Bloc members in Ottawa wrap themselves in. Those same members are trying to convince us today that they are fighting for Quebec to have a place in Ottawa, when everything they do demonstrates that they are trying to eliminate Quebec's place in Canada.

We all know that their objective is clear: no representation for Quebec in Ottawa; but we, the Liberals, believe in the principle that is dear to our democracy: one person, one vote. Those rights and freedoms, and the right to vote that is part of them, were won by our parents, our grandparents and our great-grandparents, who fought many battles for them.

In passing, I would say that in my own family, my great-grandfather, Isidore Proulx, and his son, my grandfather, Edmond Proulx, who were both elected in eastern Ontario, came here to the House of Commons to fight for their rights. I think we can say they succeeded, since I grew up in eastern Ontario entirely in French.

• (1120)

More than 40 years ago, I chose to come and live in Quebec. I am proud of that and very happy about it, but there were past battles that also proved successful.

I am thinking as well of the struggle that women waged for the right to vote and of the struggle to enable tenants and aboriginals to vote. Over the decades, all the discriminatory practices preventing various categories of people from voting were eliminated. How many countries have fought to enjoy our great democratic rights and how many citizens of these countries put their personal safety at risk in order to vote? We cannot turn this into an electoral football. We must carefully study any changes to representation and the right to vote in a comprehensive way that is fair to all Canadians.

Business of Supply

I would like to take a closer look now at the general principle behind representation. Elections Canada has prepared an instructive brochure on this called “Representation in the House of Commons of Canada”. It is available to all and makes it easier to understand the principle. We all know about one person, one vote. The Canada Elections Act specifically prescribes it. In addition, this representation must be effective. That is why we have such things as ridings.

The boundaries of the ridings are revised from time to time to reflect changes in their population and in the particular interests of each riding. I well remember the last revision of the electoral map because I sat on the committee set up to make the recommendations. The boundaries are not based purely on a mathematical formula. Regional characteristics are also considered, such as demography, urban and rural populations, and so forth. Just ask our colleague from the New Democratic Party, the hon. member for Acadie—Bathurst, because he can go on about it for hours.

Proportional representation is therefore not the only principle governing the distribution of seats in the House of Commons. Canada resulted from a desire to create a federation of provinces, the presumption being that each would be fairly represented, if not always equally. That is the basis, therefore, on which we calculate the number of seats that each province will get, rather than just a simple mathematical formula based on population.

In the Senate, we wanted regional representation, as I said earlier. During the course of the negotiations, Quebec and the Maritimes were concerned that the House of Commons would be dominated by Ontario interests because of its large population. In order to provide some balance in the Senate, an equal number of seats were therefore allotted to all three regions of the country. This equality of regional representation was preserved when the West was added. Today, each region therefore has about 25% of the seats in the Senate.

The House of Commons, however, did not take the same path. In the 1960s, it had 264 seats; in the 1990s, 282 seats; and with further expansion, it now has 308 seats. Through all this, the number of Quebec seats remained constant, while its proportion of the population declined. Quebec has often been the subject of special discussions. I would like to mention again the Charlottetown agreement. It contained a clause providing that Quebec would have no fewer than 25% of the seats in the House of Commons. History shows, though, that the referendum failed to achieve the results that the federalists hoped for, including the Conservative Party, the Liberal Party and the New Democratic Party. The opponents on the federal scene were the Bloc Québécois and the Reform Party. History shows that the Bloc has always opposed fair representation for Quebec in the Canadian federation.

Today, Quebec represents 23.2% of the Canadian population and holds 24.35% of the seats in the House of Commons. If the new formula proposed by the Conservatives were adopted, Quebec would then have 22.2% of the seats in the House, even though its population, as I was saying, accounts for 23.2% of the Canadian population.

If we compare the situation of Ontario with that of Quebec, we see that Ontario represents 38.7% of the population, although it holds only 34.3% of the seats in the House. Alberta represents 10.9%

of the population and has 9.1% of the seats; British Columbia, 13.25% of the population and 11.7% of the seats.

• (1125)

This calculation demonstrates the difficulty of coordinating the concept of proportional representation with the regional realities of the Canadian federation.

I recall that a bill was withdrawn a few years ago because on one hand it under-represented Ontario, and on the other hand it diluted the representation of Quebec. In other words, these are not new concerns.

If we look at the distribution of the 308 seats in today’s House of Commons, we see that Newfoundland and Labrador hold seven seats, Prince Edward Island four, Nova Scotia 11, New Brunswick 10, Quebec 75, Ontario 106, Manitoba 14, Saskatchewan 14, Alberta 28, and British Columbia 36. Nunavut, the Northwest Territories and the Yukon each hold one seat.

With the formula proposed by the Conservatives, Ontario would have 124 seats, Alberta 33 and British Columbia 43, for a grand total of 338 seats. However a number of provinces have expressed concern about the representation proposed by the Conservative government.

We absolutely need an informed and open-minded study of this bill in order to respond to Ontario’s cry for more seats, as evidenced in the Fairness for Ontario campaign.

We also need to be aware of the feeling of alienation in the western provinces, particularly Alberta and British Columbia. However, neither can we allow ourselves to dilute the weight of Quebec and the Atlantic provinces. I feel that we will have to be open-minded toward all these demands, and call upon all of our creativity to respond to the needs of each of the regions of Canada.

I also think it would be more sensible to study this whole issue in a responsible, serious and respectful manner in committee. I do not believe that the atmosphere in which this motion is being tabled is conducive to good discussion. What it does instead is to discredit federalism with Quebeckers, something which is not constructive.

If the Bloc Québécois had been serious about the place of Quebec, its leader would have renounced—that’s right, “renounced”—Quebec separation during his pilgrimage through the rest of Canada. He would instead have argued for better representation of Quebec within the House of Commons.

In other respects, one must admit that the Conservatives’ bill is worrying. It is in fact being tabled with an election in mind, and would have the substantial effect of reducing the representation of Quebec. What are the Conservatives going to tell us? They will repeat to us over and over that the current representation formula penalizes the provinces experiencing strong growth. I will admit that, but they have not always been in favour of fair representation. They are the ones who in 2007 tabled the bill on strict representation of one person, one vote. If that bill had been passed, only 10 additional seats would have been given to Ontario, even though the population requires a larger number.

Business of Supply

Here is the question: what did the Conservative members from Ontario do? They stayed quiet in their seats and acted against the interests of the population they represented at the time.

The Liberal Party will vote against this motion of the Bloc Québécois, which I regard as opportunistic. We Liberals will continue to work to improve the balance between the great democratic principle of representation based on population and the principle of regional representation within the Canadian federation. Quebec deserves effective representation with which it can identify. And that is what we will offer it.

• (1130)

[*English*]

Hon. Steven Fletcher (Minister of State (Democratic Reform), CPC): Madam Speaker, at the beginning of my colleague's remarks he talked about the many contributions Quebec has made to Canada and the world. I welcome him to continue with that.

I must mention the hypocrisy on the part of the Bloc members. On the one hand, they are demanding more seats for Quebec while on the other hand they are demanding that Quebec have zero seats in the House of Commons. I would like to give the hon. member an opportunity to expand on his thoughts on that.

He also talked about effective representation. I wonder if he agrees with the hypocrisy of the Bloc's position. It is obvious that the Bloc is not representing Quebecers very well. It may be better for people to invest their votes in one of the federalist parties. The Bloc motion is just a demonstration of ineffective representation by members of the Bloc Québécois.

I would like the member to talk about the fact that Alberta, B.C. and Ontario, in spite of additional seats, would still be under-represented compared to the population versus the number of seats in the House.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Marcel Proulx: Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for his question.

There are several points I would like to clarify. I mean it when I say that the Bloc Québécois caucus and the party itself are being hypocritical when they talk about representation within Canada, because we all know that the Bloc Québécois wants to take Quebec out of Canada and make it a sovereign nation. At least that part of its mission is clear and well defined, and the Bloc is clear about what it wants.

But I disagree with the Bloc members when they talk about representation and say that they cannot let this happen and that this or that must be done, because thanks to their lack of hypocrisy about their mission—if I can put it that way—we all know that they want to separate Quebec. But the minute Quebec separates from Canada, it will lose all its seats in the House of Commons of Canada.

The minister of state also suggests that the best way for Quebec to be represented within the government is to vote for a federalist party. I would go even further. Quebecers are going to have to realize one day—and I believe that day is fast approaching—that their votes have to count. They must not waste them. That means that they have

to vote for a federalist party that has a chance of forming the Government of Canada.

Madam Speaker, you were not here when the Liberals had majority governments, but those governments did a great deal for Quebec in terms of economic and social development, culture and so on.

Lastly, my colleague says that Alberta and British Columbia will still be under-represented. That is why we are in favour of going to committee so that we can take a thorough look at the impact of this Conservative bill and correct the flaws in it.

• (1135)

Mr. Daniel Paillé (Hochelaga, BQ): Mr. Speaker, my colleague from Gaspésie—Îles-de-la-Madeleine had in fact forewarned me. I am bitterly disappointed with the speech by my colleague from Hull—Aylmer. He forgets that at one time they held 74 out of 75 seats and that resulted in the sponsorship scandal. Quebecers remember it.

Our colleague talked about his family. He is not the only one; my nephew also sits in the House. So, as one family to another, we will respect each other.

The Bloc introduces its motions. No one will tell the Bloc what to introduce. I will assure my colleagues of one thing: all Bloc members will be here this evening to vote for the motion and get it passed. We will not be tripping over our shoes as the Liberal Party did: last time, on March 23, the Liberal Party had us waste an entire day, saying it wanted something. And then poof, it failed. You do not waste your colleagues' time.

We agree on the principle of “one person, one vote”, and that is why we want to abolish the Senate. The Senate is not elected, that is true. Our objective is to ensure that Quebec is sovereign, but while waiting for that to happen, we will sit in this House, whether they like it or not, and we will get elected.

Mr. Marcel Proulx: Madam Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague from Hochelaga. I want to tell him that even before he was advised by his colleague, he already had every reason to think I was not going to support a motion of this kind to help the Bloc Québécois achieve its objective. I think the member from Hochelaga should have been more realistic. I have never concealed my Canadian values and my beliefs. It is therefore surprising that he would be disappointed by my attitude. He is new in the House of Commons, and perhaps he is a little naive, even though he is an experienced politician.

To begin with, I would like to say that the respect he spoke of does not apply to families alone. I am very proud to talk about my ancestors. And he is proud to talk about his family. Although I do not necessarily respect the opinion of the government party or the other opposition parties, I respect the individuals because they are what our democracy is based on. I think that is very important.

As to the fact that the Bloc Québécois is happy with its motions, in my mind there is no doubt on that. It has its own motions. Often, we agree with its ideas, for example when it comes to governance of the country. But there is a portion of its opinions that I do not respect and that I will never respect. But for now, I will point out to the Bloc Québécois members that the party in power is a federalist party.

Business of Supply

•(1140)

[English]

Mr. Bruce Hyer (Thunder Bay—Superior North, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it seems to me that the Bloc motion is, in large part, a reaction to Bill C-12, which would give more seats to Ontario, B.C. and Alberta. We have certain regions where votes are worth more in one region than another. For example, in Saskatchewan votes are worth 54% more than they are in B.C. and in New Brunswick they are worth 38% more than they are in Ontario.

However, we need two kinds of equality. We need equality in the number of votes per MP but we also need equality in the weight of all votes by party. To elect one Bloc member it takes about 28,000 votes on average, for a Conservative about 36,000, for a Liberal 47,000, for an NDPer 67,000 and for the Green Party zero votes for a million.

Will the Liberals be supporting proportional representation by party?

[Translation]

Mr. Marcel Proulx: Madam Speaker, surely my colleague is hoping that I will give him a controversial answer. I will simply tell him to be patient. We will start by considering the bill brought forward by the Conservative government in committee to ensure that there is a balance not only for British Columbia and Prince Edward Island, but for the whole country. We respect the principle of one person, one vote. We must proceed gradually. Personally, I think that once the bill is in committee, we will be able to reach agreements, to compromise and to come up with solutions that each and everyone in the country will find satisfactory and that will ensure fair representation.

Mr. Thomas Mulcair (Outremont, NDP): Madam Speaker, I too am pleased to speak to the motion brought forward by the Bloc Québécois.

First I will go back to something our colleague from Hull—Aylmer just said. He used a term that is allowed here, in Parliament, but that would not have been allowed in the Quebec National Assembly. He used the term “hypocrisy” with regard to the Bloc Québécois. I will give him the definition of this term since he obviously does not know it.

Hypocrisy means disguising one's true character, expressing opinions and showing sentiments and especially virtues that one does not have.

The presentation that I will make over the next 20 minutes will demonstrate to whomever is interested in this situation that only one political party is hypocritical regarding this issue, namely the Liberal Party of Canada.

The Bloc Québécois has its own option, which we obviously do not share, but it is perfectly consistent. The good thing about today's debate is that the Liberal Party just said it would never vote to reduce Quebec's democratic weight in the House of Commons. The hon. member in question is experienced and I hope he can read the newspapers, even if not the dictionary. Hopefully, he read the articles saying an amendment would be moved to the Bloc motion in order to do precisely what the Liberal member claimed he wanted to do, that is, prevent Quebec's weight in the House of Commons from

being reduced. It may well just be hypocrisy, however, on the part of the Liberal Party of Canada when it says it does not want Quebec's weight in Parliament reduced. Those are the exact words he used.

We are going to have a chance this afternoon to compare what the Liberal Party says with what it does. An amendment will be moved to do exactly what they claimed they wanted. Then we will find out who the hypocrite is in the House, the Liberal Party or the other parties.

The bill in question has two purposes. First, it resolves an absolutely intolerable situation regarding the representation of British Columbia, Alberta and Ontario. In all, 30 seats will be added in provinces that are currently badly under-represented, a situation that is simply unacceptable in our democracy. As the Liberal member said so well, the federalist parties—the Conservatives, the Liberals and the NDP—supported the Charlottetown accord. The problem is that it failed to pass.

The Liberal member puts the blame on the Bloc Québécois and the Reformers, who now enjoy undivided rule over what used to be called the Progressive Conservative Party. The progressives have all jumped ship and it is the conservative Reformers who are in power in this minority government.

This situation must be corrected, while maintaining the democratic weight of the only province with a francophone majority and the only province whose people have been recognized by this Parliament as forming a nation within Canada.

When the negotiations began on the Meech Lake agreement, the Liberal Party did all it could to sabotage them. Remember Pierre Trudeau and his henceforth famous speech at the Maison Egg Roll in Montreal. It was his idea of humour to denigrate the federal political parties that had worked so hard to keep Quebec in Canada.

•(1145)

This attitude on the part of the Trudeau Liberals, of whom the hon. member who just spoke is a shining example, is very easy to understand. In their view, Canada consists of equal provinces. There are no distinctions, nor any recognition of Quebec as a distinct society, as proposed in the Meech Lake agreement, nor any attempt to keep Quebec's democratic weight at 25%, as proposed in the Charlottetown accord. Neither of these ideas was acceptable in the world of Pierre Elliott Trudeau.

According to the Trudeau vision of Canada, the best way for the Liberal Party to stay in power was to constantly kick Quebecers in the shins, wait for them to react, and then go to the rest of Canada and say, “Look what whiners they are and how hard to get along with. Lucky that Trudeau and his gang are there to keep them under control”. That was the Liberal way that worked so well in Canada for decades on end.

Business of Supply

We in the NDP will support the amendment that the Bloc Québécois has proposed to its main motion, which would make the motion match the one unanimously adopted early last October by the National Assembly of Quebec, and which is simply intended to do the following. If we are sincere in saying that Canada includes a nation, the Québécois nation, which is the only nation recognized as distinct within this federation, we must take concrete action to give effect to that recognition. It is contradictory to start reducing the demographic and democratic weight of Quebec in this House if we are sincere about Quebec constituting a distinct society.

My jaw dropped when the hon. Liberal member for Hull—Aylmer said earlier that the sum total of his research on the subject was to consult—and I quote him because it was so moving—“an instructive brochure” from Elections Canada. Yes, you heard right. The sum total of the electoral research of the Liberal Party of Canada is to read an instructive Elections Canada brochure. He goes on to tell us that Canada has a system of one person, one vote. The problem with the absolute system of one person, one vote is that it is the American system found in a republic south of our borders where the parliamentary tradition is different from ours.

I realize that the Supreme Court of Canada cannot compare with an instructive brochure, but its decisions can be instructive all the same. The Supreme Court of Canada has recognized that, in our country, in our federation, there is a reality that it has described as communities of interests. This is why our electoral map contains certain exceptions such as the four seats in Prince Edward Island, or one seat for 40,000 electors in the Northwest Territories. This is exactly what our Supreme Court said it was necessary to do with a country which today has a population of 33 million and is the second biggest country in the world. Regional differences must be taken into account.

The problem with the Conservatives' bill is that the big loser, the one and only province that would see its demographic weight change from a surplus—at 104%—to a deficit, the only province to suffer that fate is Quebec. You heard me correctly. The big loser in what the Conservatives are trying to get passed in this House is Quebec. These are the same Conservatives who had the arrogance to propose the recognition of a nation they had no intention of subsequently respecting. They make a show of recognizing the Quebec nation, but whenever the time comes to do something concrete to give effect and recognition to that distinctness, the Conservatives do the opposite. They attack Quebec, they attack its demographic weight here in the House, they attack its capacity to remain within its own fields of jurisdiction. They do this time after time.

● (1150)

This is not recognizing a nation. This is not recognizing uniqueness. This is not recognizing a distinct character. This is the same Reform party that fought against the Charlottetown accord. This is the same anti-Quebec Reform party that is showing its true colours here. It is as if they think that the only way to give British Columbia, Alberta and Ontario their due is to reduce Quebec's representation to this extent.

We are going to have a very interesting political experience here this afternoon. Those wagging their fingers at their neighbours, the Liberals, who love to lecture everyone else, are going to be

confronted with their own hypocrisy. The Liberals have just said—the sentence is worth remembering—that they are formally opposed—as their spokesperson said—to any weakening of Quebec's representation and democratic weight in the House of Commons of Canada. This is what they just stated, word for word.

This afternoon, there will be an amendment to the Bloc motion that sets out to do, word for word, what the Liberals have just said that they wanted to do. We shall see what the Liberals will do with that amendment.

The current leader of the Liberals is their fifth in five years. There was Jean Chrétien, Paul Martin, Bill Graham, one who is still here, the hon. member for Saint-Laurent—Cartierville and the current one from Toronto, who comes to us from England and agreed to move to Canada as long as he got to be its prime minister.

I remember as if it were yesterday when he spoke in the same breath of the Canadian political situation and civil war, a juxtaposition that only he could explain. This is the extent to which this man is completely out of touch with the reality of Quebec and of Canada. He is completely out of touch and yet he is the leader of the Liberal party. His spokesperson, the hon. member for Hull—Aylmer, who just referred to Bloc members as hypocrites, will therefore have the opportunity this afternoon to show whether or not he is a hypocrite himself. There will be a motion proposing exactly what he says he wants to do: prevent Quebec from losing any democratic weight and any representation in the House of Commons of Canada.

Nothing will discredit what his leader recently called the political class more than standing up and declaiming in a trembling voice that one defends Quebec's interests and its representation here, then voting against the motion in the afternoon.

This is a big moment for the Liberal Party of Canada this afternoon. We are going to see whether the Liberals, who are fond of lecturing others, are still emulating Pierre Trudeau, who killed the real Canada that had been built since 1867. Will they choose Pierre Trudeau's “One Canada” or a Canada that reflects our reality and the fact that there is a distinct Quebec nation within that federation?

Those of us who have spent our political careers working tirelessly to keep Quebec in Canada—or as my leader, the member for Toronto—Danforth, is fond of saying, those of us who have worked to create winning conditions for Canada within Quebec—are going to keep on doing whatever we can to make Quebec realize that Canada is the best option for workers, for families and for Quebec's future.

● (1155)

The biggest problem is the attitude the Liberal Party has had for the past 40 years. That has been the main problem with the Canadian federation since the time of Pierre Elliott Trudeau. The Liberals pay lip service to the idea of recognizing Quebec, but when push comes to shove, they always vote against such recognition.

The sad fact is that the Meech Lake and Charlottetown accords, which were negotiated in good faith, were necessary because the Canadian Constitution that Pierre Elliott Trudeau and Jean Chrétien repatriated includes the law passed in English only in England, with a bilingual schedule. The law begins with the words “Whereas Canada has requested”.

Business of Supply

It is a bald-faced lie to say that Canada requested this, because Quebec was not included, unless the point was to show that to Pierre Elliott Trudeau and the Liberal Party of Canada, Canada did not include Quebec. That has been the problem since 1982. The Canadian Constitution, which was adopted despite both sovereignist and federalist opposition in Quebec City, still exists. In spite of the Meech Lake and Charlottetown accords, which were negotiated in good faith, the government has never managed to accommodate Quebec to this day.

We went step by step, line by line, recognition by recognition, thereby admitting that a big constitutional debate was perhaps not the only course of action. We can go step by step so long as our words mean something. The Conservatives recognized Quebec as a nation within a united Canada, and the other parties followed suit. That recognition was unanimous. On October 9, 2009, the National Assembly of Quebec was also unanimous: it asked the federal government to renounce the tabling of any bill whose consequence would be to reduce the weight of Quebec in the House of Commons.

And that is exactly what is before us today. The words of the Conservatives will be judged in terms of what happens here, this afternoon. The argument of the Liberal member for Hull—Aylmer that his party would vote against a motion that seeks to do exactly what he claims to want, in order to refer it to committee, is a web of lies that needs unravelling.

The spokesman for the Liberal Party of Canada told the House, barely half an hour ago, that his party would oppose any attempt to weaken Quebec's weight in the House. He cannot say that and then turn around and vote against the Bloc's motion and amendment, which seek to do exactly that.

The NDP speaks with one voice on this. We will support the amendment, which aligns the Bloc's motion with the unanimous motion of the National Assembly of Quebec. Let us hope there are enough men and women of good faith in this room to understand that, beyond the jeers and attacks of the Liberal party, if they believe that Quebec constitutes a nation within a united Canada, they cannot say so in one breath and vote against the recognition of that reality in the next breath.

So it is with pride that the NDP will vote this afternoon in favour of this amendment, which seeks to preserve Quebec's demographic and democratic weight in the House of Commons. At the same time, the NDP will continue to work fervently to rectify a situation that is unacceptable for British Columbia, Alberta and Ontario.

• (1200)

If the Supreme Court recognizes the reality of communities of interest, what could be a more important community of interest than the only province with a francophone majority?

[English]

Hon. Steven Fletcher (Minister of State (Democratic Reform), CPC): Mr. Speaker, there seems to be a contradiction in the NDP caucus. Just a few weeks ago the NDP member from Windsor was quoted in *The Hill Times* as supporting representation by population. Coming from Ontario, perhaps that is an indication why he believes this.

The formula that the Conservative government has brought forward is simply a recognition that faster growing provinces are under-represented. We have a principle-based formula that addresses this, as much as possible, although Ontario, B.C. and Alberta, using the member's logic, would still be under-represented in the House, just not as much as they have been.

The member suggests that either he does not agree with the principle of representation by population, or he does not agree that Alberta, Ontario and B.C. are under-represented, or he advocates some other formula. It is not clear, but it certainly is not consistent with the representation by population, which is what this government has proposed. It is very simple.

Mr. Thomas Mulcair: Mr. Speaker, it is completely false to affirm, as the minister just did, that this bill does not treat Quebec worse than the other provinces. The only province in Canada to go from a slight percentage over population to being below its representation by population is Quebec. Therefore, on the first point of representation by population he is completely wrong.

With regard to the provinces of British Columbia, Alberta and Ontario, yes, a situation has to be corrected and that was in the first paragraph of the letter the leader of the NDP sent to the leader of the Bloc Québécois. We say the same thing in the House that we say outside this House. However, we also voted for the recognition of Quebec as a distinct society in Canada.

The Conservative government now has arrived before the House and has proposed a bill where the big loser, the only province that makes the change from being above average to being the only that drops below, is Quebec. How can Conservatives, with a straight face, claim to support the recognition of the Québécois as a distinct nation within Canada and still propose that Quebec lose its democratic and demographic weight in the House?

It is an absolute contradiction. We can do both. When we are in the business of nation building, we do not divide one against the other. We do not use words like the Liberals did, like hypocrite, to attack the Bloc. If we really believe in Canada, we understand that Quebec is special within Canada for historical, cultural and legal reasons. If people like me had spent their life in Quebec City fighting to keep Quebec in Canada, they would fight against those who would use a pretext like this as a way of dividing Canadians among themselves.

• (1205)

[Translation]

Mr. Daniel Paillé (Hochelaga, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I wonder if the member for Outremont could elaborate on his views regarding the fact that this government, and the Liberal Party of Canada, do not recognize the unanimous will of the National Assembly, led by the Premier of Quebec, whom he knows very well and who is a former leader of the Conservative Party of Canada. Could the member give us his views on the fact that the leader of the Quebec Liberal Party, in which he was an excellent Minister of the Environment, is being ignored, along with the whole National Assembly, by government members and by our neighbours on this side?

Mr. Thomas Mulcair: Mr. Speaker, the hardest thing to swallow today is indeed the double talk being spouted by the Liberal Party of Canada.

Business of Supply

Reformists, who are enjoying unchallenged dominance in a party called the Conservative Party but that bears no resemblance to the former Progressive Conservative Party, have always been anti-Quebec. They have always fought against any recognition or accommodation for Quebec, except on the day when they realized that, by doing a spin in this House, they could propose that Quebecers be recognized as a nation within a united Canada. This was meant to embarrass the Liberals right in the midst of a leadership race. The proposal was unanimously passed.

Since then, they have constantly targeted this recognition. Not only do they refuse to give it real content, but they also remove some of the content that is already there, such as Quebecers' percentage of representation in the House.

As for the Liberals, they take the cake. We recognize the Liberals of Pierre Trudeau, their speech at the Maison du Egg Roll, their anti-Quebec rhetoric to better provoke Quebecers and ensure a BQ and PQ resistance. This scenario has always served the interests of the Liberal Party of Canada. The Liberals would go in the rest of Canada and say that the country was lucky to have them to fight evil separatists.

As for the NDP, it has an open-minded and positive attitude. We want to build bridges, not destroy them. Unfortunately, as regards the Conservatives, they say one thing when they recognize Quebecers as a nation, but their actions do not reflect their words. The big loser with this legislation is Quebec. That is the sad reality created by the Conservatives' actions.

[*English*]

Mr. David Tilson (Dufferin—Caledon, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the member for Outremont has stated that he plans to bring a further amendment forward. If he did not state that, then he should perhaps clarify it. If he is to bring one forward, when will he do it? We would like to hear.

When I look at the motion, as amended, it makes me think of the political maxim that we learned in school, that all people are created equal but some people are more equal than others. That is what this motion says.

The motion means there would be 10 additional seats for the province of Quebec. It means there would be diminished representation for the provinces in the rest of the country. It means there would be 348 seats in the House of Commons. It also means topping up Quebec's count in perpetuity, no matter the population in the rest of the provinces. In other words, if the population in the other provinces increased, this motion, as amended, would mean that Quebec would continue to get more representation.

If that is what the member for Outremont supports, then that is not fair.

• (1210)

Mr. Thomas Mulcair: Mr. Speaker, I note with great interest the obvious contradiction between the fact the member says that if we have an amendment, he would like to see it. Then in the next sentence he says the motion, as amended, which means he has seen it. The reason he has seen it is because it is in the newspapers. I suspect that even some people in the Conservative Party are able to read newspapers.

With regard to the fact that some are more equal than others, the proposition that the Québécois form a nation within Canada originated from his Prime Minister. There are only two possibilities. Either his Prime Minister was sincere when he proposed to the House that the Québécois be recognized as a nation within a united Canada, or it was a political stunt. If he was sincere, then we have to make the accommodation.

Nation building is a bit more work than just throwing bombs across the floor, like the Conservatives like to do. If they would like to start to build bridges instead of bombing bridges, then they could join us to ensure that we make Quebec a winner within Canada, while at the same time we correct an historical inequity for the provinces of British Columbia, Alberta and Ontario.

Guess what? We can walk and chew gum at the same time.

Mr. David Christopherson (Hamilton Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for Outremont for spelling out so clearly and effectively the position of the NDP. We have spent a lot of time on this and we continue to spend a lot of time on the reform of Parliament to make it work better for Canadians.

My question is with regard to the member for Outremont's referral to the leader of our party, the member for Toronto—Danforth, who has always talked about creating winning conditions for Quebec within Canada. Both the member for Outremont and the member for Toronto—Danforth have talked about giving effect to the meaning of a recognized nation within a united Canada.

If we do not recognize that some accommodation needs to be made, what would that do to the chances of Quebec ever signing on formally to the Constitution to be a part of our great country?

Mr. Thomas Mulcair: Mr. Speaker, my colleague raises the key point that is being discussed here today. We cannot, out of one side of our mouths, keep claiming that we recognize the Québécois as a nation within a united Canada and, on the other hand, every time we have the opportunity to do something to give real meaning to that, turn our noses up at it, as the Conservatives seem intent upon doing.

Those of us, like the leader of the New Democratic Party, who were born in Quebec and understand the reality of Quebec have always fought to keep Quebec and Canada together and understand the importance of what is being done here today. Those who seek to divide, like the Conservatives and the Liberals, will have to live with the history of this.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Meili Faille (Vaudreuil-Soulanges, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I will be sharing my time with the hon. member for Sherbrooke.

I rise today to speak on a bill of great importance to Quebec. Indeed, we have an opportunity today to discuss the principles that the Conservative government wants to impose in the redistribution of seats that is planned following the 2011 census. This threat is real and concerns us greatly. In its present form, the bill is far from perfect. It does nothing for Quebec, and over the longer term it is quite obvious that the Prime Minister is seeking to minimize the representation of Quebecers.

Business of Supply

Whether the Minister of State likes it or not, this bill clearly demonstrates that the political parties who have spoken, the Liberals and the former Reform members, hold contradictory views. The irony of the redistribution that the Conservatives are proposing in this bill is that Quebec's influence in politics in Canada would be diminished. This is nothing more than a partisan manoeuvre against the Quebec nation. That is the ultimate objective of the Liberals and the Conservatives. It appears that no accommodation is possible, and that is unacceptable.

What the government is really after is a majority of seats, and it will pursue that even if it leads to minimizing the place of francophones within Canada and denying effective representation of francophones within Quebec, which is the cradle of francophones in Canada. The only ones who would support such an approach are the political parties trying to achieve a majority government. It is clear that the historical rules that have prevailed since the negotiations that led to the Act of Union of 1840 and the subsequent integration of other provinces are being tossed aside. What is more, each additional rule was an attempt to re-establish some kind of fair representation of the people elected in each province and to preserve their unique qualities. Everybody benefited. Only Quebec, because of one specific measure, does not receive that historic recognition in the current bill. Once again, Canada consists of all the provinces and territories except Quebec.

We must remember that at the very beginning of Canada's history the principle of representation by population was not adopted, because that would have put anglophones in a minority position due to their smaller population. Quebec would have dominated with greater political power. The government must respect certain principles above all. Why should we not benefit from the full recognition of the Quebec nation and protection of its special character that makes it so unique in North America?

Mr. Speaker, you will surely recall the motion recognizing Quebec as a nation. That motion in 2006 surprised many people. Can you tell me what measures the government introduced in favour of that concept? I am trying to find examples that would serve as basic arguments for a reform proposal. I have looked and I have not found any. I believe that before trying to introduce a new model of representation, it would have been wise to introduce concrete measures long before today. This government has certainly had many opportunities. Instead of a firm commitment to recognize Quebec for what it is, the Conservatives have proved that they are not serious about meeting their obligations.

Why be so hasty to make these changes? What is the rush? Even worse, why is the political representation of Quebec being sidelined? The Meech Lake accord in 1990 and the Charlottetown accord in 1992 tried to bring Quebec back into the Canadian fold. Does the Conservative government want to cause a third constitutional rift?

The representation of some provinces is protected within a proportional representation system, so why does the Conservative government's plan not include some way to protect the relative weight of Quebec? As the Chief Justice of the British Columbia Supreme Court has stated, the Canadian constitution has never provided for mathematically perfect representation, but has always included protection for provinces in which the population is in relative decline. Population growth in Quebec is not keeping pace

with other provinces. That is the truth of the matter. Does that mean that measures should not be taken to protect Quebec's representation? Of course not.

Given the way the federal government has treated Quebec, there is every reason to be wary of quick legislation in this area. Quebecers do not currently support this type of change. An Angus Reid poll on April 7, 2010, showed that 71% of Quebecers were opposed to this bill.

• (1215)

Quebecers are entitled to expect the government to formally recognize the Quebec nation and the fact that French is its common language, to have their national culture and cultural institutions fully recognized, and to be able to encourage newcomers to look at Quebec culture as being different from other cultures. We debated many other examples during the last session of Parliament. It is clear to me that the interests and challenges of the Quebec nation are different from those of Canada. Do you understand that?

Does the government have valid grounds to proceed unilaterally without the support of at least seven provinces representing at least 50% of the population of Canada? Where is Quebec's protection under paragraph 42(1) *a*), which establishes modified proportional representation taking into account population decline and the principles of other rules on the Senate floor where a province cannot have fewer seats in the Commons than it has in the Senate?

Ontario has long benefited from the original 1867 formula. I would love to hear a member stand up and say in this House that Quebec does not have the right to demand the same guarantee. Quebec is entitled to "effective representation", because below a certain threshold, it cannot effectively defend its interests. I urge you to think about what would happen if Quebec's proportion of seats were to decrease. What is disturbing—and the bill makes this abundantly clear—is that Quebec's distinct character is still being denied and Quebec is being given minority status within Canada and left unprotected. What do you have for Quebecers other than recognition of the Quebec nation, which should absolutely remain unconditional? Is that it?

I still believe that we need to take a closer look at the behaviour of the parliamentarians who wish to form a so-called majority government. As long as parties remain under the influence of rather undemocratic circles, namely, large corporations and other entrepreneurs with lots of money and a relaxed code of ethics, the interests of the people can never be properly defended. Just look at what the government does to satisfy its electoral base. Now look at the nature of the scandals currently affecting this government. What can we say about Quebec's position compared to that of the Government of Canada at the Copenhagen summit on climate change? Not to mention that the government remains elusive about the questions surrounding the public inquiries that Quebecers and Canadians are demanding. On each of these issues, the government replies with scripted lines that avoid the substance of the issues. Senior officials sound like broken records or are being silenced.

Business of Supply

As many members will agree, the high degree of censorship is extremely worrisome. There is every reason to believe that the problem could be elsewhere. What does the next government have in store for us and what policies will it try to introduce? What is next from this government, the master of prorogation and the culture of secrecy? What could possibly justify such a bill that does not recognize either democracy or proportional representation, considering the recognition of the Quebec nation?

In closing, will the bill make it through the legislative process, when a similar bill died on the order paper in 2007? Why is the government so determined to limit Quebec's influence? While the idea of improving political representation in the House of Commons for the provinces with the fastest population growth is commendable, the Conservative government must not lose sight of Quebec's unique character when it considers increasing the number of seats in Ontario, British Columbia and Alberta. If the goal is to impose purely proportional representation or full representation by population, the government needs the approval of the seven provinces with 50% of the population of Canada.

Since Quebec is a mainly French-speaking nation, it is only natural that it wants to defend its political weight in Ottawa. We cannot accept the bill as it stands, since it aims to continue diminishing the position of francophones within Canada. I am sure the members will understand. Now we simply have to wait and see who has the political courage.

• (1220)

[English]

Mr. Paul Calandra (Oak Ridges—Markham, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is a shame to be in the House and hear Bloc member after Bloc member talk down the successes and the contributions of the people of Quebec. When I think of Quebec I think of a great province within a united Canada that has helped us build a remarkable country.

I represent a riding that had over 170,000 people at the time of the last election, with over 7,000 more occupancies since then. I represent probably close to 190,000 people in my constituency alone. I am not sure how the member thinks it is fair that the people of my riding should have their vote be worth so much less than in other parts of the country. In particular, is it not true that one of the greatest threats to our nation is when people do not feel that their vote is actually worth what it is supposed to be worth and that when they go to the ballot box and make their intentions known that their vote might not be counted?

Is not the real reason that the Bloc is putting forward an amendment like this is that it hopes to discourage people in the rest of the country and, by doing so, that will bring its ultimate aim of removing Quebec from Canada that much closer to reality?

I would also say that the alternative is that members of the Bloc think I am such a valuable member of Parliament that I can represent 200,000 people without problems and that they actually need more of a crutch in the province of Quebec. They need ridings that are smaller because perhaps the members of the Bloc do not quite have the same ability to represent the people of Quebec that I do.

Those are the only things I can gather from a motion such as this. I think the good people of Quebec have contributed a tremendous amount to this country. I am proud that Quebec is an important province within a unified Canada. I hope members of the Bloc will at some point in time reflect on all of the good work and hard work that the people of Quebec have done to help build such a great country.

• (1225)

[Translation]

Ms. Meili Faille: Mr. Speaker, I will give a simple answer to my colleague opposite. What is important to those who elected us, members of the Bloc Québécois, is to identify with the values that are shared here in this House. The principle of representation by population is laudable. I said so in my conclusion. Maybe the member did not hear my speech.

However, we must take into account what makes Quebec such a distinct society. That is exactly what is missing from the bill that was introduced and what Quebecers perceive as a threat.

[English]

Mr. Paul Calandra: Mr. Speaker, in her speech the member also mentioned how the voting patterns were at the time of Confederation. I recall that at the time of Confederation women were not given the opportunity to vote in general elections. It took some time for us to do that.

I know the member cannot possibly be suggesting that looking back on how this country was formed is the way we should determine voting patterns.

Again I would ask the hon. member the same question. I represent close to 200,000 people, one of the largest ridings in the country, if not the largest riding in the country. Is the member and the Bloc suggesting that I am such a good member of Parliament that I can do that? Is she suggesting that the Bloc members currently do not have the ability to represent people effectively so they need to reduce the number of people they represent and the size of their ridings because they have just been so incredibly unsuccessful in all of the years that they have been representing Quebec here?

[Translation]

Ms. Meili Faille: Mr. Speaker, I am pleased that the member raised the issue of the representation of women here because it so happens that one of the criticisms made about the bill—which has been heavily criticized in the newspapers—is that its implementation would weaken the representation of women in Parliament.

Women in Quebec do not identify with the current government, its values and the legislation it brings forward and we have the right to come here and express their wishes loud and clear.

I would encourage the member opposite to do his homework on the application of the bill. I too represent a heavily populated riding and I manage to serve my constituents, but I also manage to express in this House the priorities and values that these people expect me to defend. Decreasing Quebec's political weight in the House will simply compromise the effectiveness of my work in Parliament.

Mr. Serge Cardin (Sherbrooke, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague for agreeing to share her speaking time with me.

Business of Supply

At this point, after listening to several members, I would like to look again at this motion and discuss it along with the amendment that is included.

That the House denounce the fact that the government seeks to marginalize the Quebec nation by introducing a bill to decrease Quebec's political weight in the House, and call on the government not to enact any legislation that would reduce Quebec's current representation in the House of Commons of 24.35% of the seats.

I often think of the party leader who claims to govern Canada, and therefore Quebec, and who, in December 2005, promised Quebec all that openness. I did not say "the Quebec nation" because at that time the leader did not believe in the Quebec nation. He spoke about an open federalism and the recognition of our distinctive character, and cleverly succeeded in winning a minority government. The word "minority" is very important because, in that case, he avoided a disaster both in Quebec and in the rest of Canada.

Of course, that was followed by the recognition of the Quebec nation in this House, thanks to the initiative of the Bloc Québécois. This was strategic for the government at the time. Did they really believe it? Probably not, given what they have and have not done since then. They tried to use the motion to once again hoodwink Quebecers. Obviously, as time goes on, this has not worked as well. What are they trying to do now? They are trying to marginalize Quebec, to reduce its political weight. They think that will fly.

At the same time that they want to reduce the political weight of Quebec, they are reducing their own influence in Quebec. I mean that there are fewer and fewer Quebecers who believe the empty speeches of this party in power. If it does remain in power, I hope that it will always be a minority. If we had a more courageous official opposition, both the Quebec nation and the Canadian nation would come out ahead.

When two nations negotiate as equals, we can talk about a weight of 50% each and of a contribution to a common objective.

Of course, there would be no point in saying that Quebec wants 50% of the seats in this House. That would not fly. As my colleague said previously, Quebec's population amounts to 50% of the population of the rest of Canada. I am an accountant and other economist colleagues have done the calculations; 50% of 50% is 25%. That percentage would have been reasonable, but we have to admit that today we are at 24.35%. The vote of the National Assembly is very clear, and it is unanimous. Quebec's representation in the House of Commons must not be reduced.

● (1230)

That is where we get that percentage. We are not prepared to work with anything less than the political weight we currently have.

At the beginning of the debate, I heard the Liberal Party say the same thing, but we were told that it would vote against the Bloc Québécois motion. The Liberal member actually called the Bloc Québécois hypocrites, and I am wondering what the Liberal Party is going to do.

There are 75 members from Quebec in the House. Normally, they should defend Quebec's interests because they normally recognize the nation of Quebec. I say "normally" because I am including the

Conservatives. It must be recognized not only in words, but also in deeds. The 75 members from Quebec should all agree on the motion of the National Assembly to maintain Quebec's political weight.

The hon. Conservative member said earlier that we were less able to represent more numerous ridings than theirs. I do not believe that. If he was saying that to insult us, we can only imagine how the members from Prince Edward Island must be feeling. If I am not mistaken, according to the latest figures, there were four members from Prince Edward Island representing around 100,000 people, which is the equivalent of the new city of Sherbrooke.

I represent the former cities of Sherbrooke, Fleurimont and Bromptonville, which add up to a good number of people. I could have just as well represented the whole new city of Sherbrooke, but the hon. member from Compton—Stanstead would not have liked that very much.

So it is not a question of an inability to meet the needs of our constituents. On the contrary, we must go beyond numbers, and recognize the needs of a people and of a nation. We must meet its deepest aspirations. No nation can really agree to having its political weight in this House reduced.

I would like to say something else about all the Quebec members in the House. I believe that none of these members, if they want the support of Quebecers in the next elections, can vote against the Bloc Québécois motion. Obviously, I am addressing the Liberals. I think there are 14 Liberal members from Quebec. I am also addressing the 11 Conservative members from Quebec and the one independent member from Quebec. All members from Quebec should unanimously support the Bloc motion. That would prevent Quebec's political weight from being reduced. It is a question of nationhood, as simple as that, and of the respect that entails. I cannot imagine that the Liberals and Conservatives who consider themselves to be a part of that nation can vote against this motion and agree to having Quebec's political weight reduced.

● (1235)

Ms. France Bonsant (Compton—Stanstead, BQ): I agree with my colleague from Sherbrooke, Mr. Speaker. What matters is not quantity, but quality.

In 1992, when the Charlottetown accord was signed without Quebec's consent, there were 75 federalists in Quebec, 74 of whom were Liberals who forced the Constitution down Quebec's throat. Now, they are insulting the Bloc Québécois for standing up for Quebec's values, language and culture in this place since 1993.

I would like to know what my colleague from Sherbrooke thinks of the insulting remarks by federalists about the democratic vote of the people who send to Ottawa elected members to represent them to the best of their knowledge and values.

Mr. Serge Cardin: Mr. Speaker, the very existence and presence of the Bloc Québécois in this House represent the greatest expression of democracy that I know of. In a country like Canada, within this federal system, people still have the right and opportunity to rise and state what they want, assert their aspirations and trust that someone will respond to their needs and those aspirations.

Business of Supply

Indeed, the presence of the Bloc Québécois in this place is the finest expression of democracy, and we are up front about it—we are no hypocrites—we want Quebec to achieve independence. We are indépendantistes. The federalists in Quebec, both Liberals and Conservatives, refer to us as sovereignists and, often, as the evil separatists. The appropriate term, however, for us would be indépendantistes, and for the federalists from Quebec, it would be “dépendantistes” because therein lies all the difference. The “dépendantistes”, otherwise known as Quebec federalists, expect to get more because the pie appears to be larger. They have career plans, they are career-oriented. We Bloc members from Quebec are here for the Quebec nation and for it to achieve complete independence.

• (1240)

[*English*]

Mr. David Tilson (Dufferin—Caledon, CPC): Mr. Speaker, contrary to what my friend from the Bloc Québécois has just stated, this motion is contrary to any democratic principle that I have heard. Clearly, the Bloc Québécois is opposed to representation by population. It is clearly opposed to that. I can say, for example, that Alberta's population has been increasing in 2010-2011 at twice the rate of the province of Quebec. However, in this motion, that is before the House today as presented by the Bloc Québécois, the province of Quebec would get twice as many seats as the province of Alberta. That is not fair.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Serge Cardin: Mr. Speaker, no one in a “normal” country could be opposed to democratic representation. One person, one vote: that is a right. People may think of other types of representation, but the situation today is different. Conservatives and “dependentists” generally cannot get their head around the fact that when they accepted something that has always existed—the Quebec nation—there were things that could not be applied across the board. That is a simplistic view because we have that dimension, we have a unique Quebec nation and we have the Canadian nation.

How should it work? Do the Conservatives think it should work a different way? The very least that we propose is that the democratic weight of Quebec in this House remain the same.

Hon. Stockwell Day (President of the Treasury Board and Minister for the Asia-Pacific Gateway, CPC): Mr. Speaker, today we are discussing the Bloc Québécois motion to preserve the number of members Quebec currently has in the House of Commons. I would like to point out that the motion has already been rejected by the people of Quebec. In addition, our constitution already guarantees Quebec 75 members of Parliament, regardless of the province's population.

We have tabled another bill, with the Constitution, that will give more seats to provinces in which the population has increased. For free citizens, the principle of representation by population is fundamental. It is absolutely fundamental for democracies the world over.

My friend opposite said that this is a principle in a normal country but not Canada. What exactly is a normal country? He implied that Canada is not normal, and that is an entirely different debate.

It is important to recognize that our democratic system is supported by other countries. It is the foundation for any country that wishes to be considered democratic.

Many of my colleagues on this side of the House have debated this issue. Once I have finished, I will give the floor to the member for Edmonton Centre, with whom I am sharing my time because it is important to hear what Alberta and British Columbia, where my riding is located, have to say.

For years, we have witnessed dramatic population growth, especially in Ontario, Alberta and British Columbia. Our Constitution therefore requires that the number of members be increased. Those are the facts. The principle in Canada is representation by population, but it is not perfect. It does not apply perfectly in all constituencies.

Several years ago, a Supreme Court judge, the Honourable Beverley McLachlin, ruled that it was not essential to have the same number of people in every constituency, but that the principle of representation by population was paramount.

To reflect population growth in British Columbia, Alberta and Ontario, our bill gives those provinces another seven, five and 18 seats respectively.

• (1245)

At the same time, we are going to continue to extend our support, so that Quebec has 75 MPs, regardless of its population. The system that we support gives more weight to Quebec MPs, because even if the population in their ridings is somewhat less than in other regions of the country, they will continue to hold a minimum of 75 seats.

There is another interesting thing about the Bloc's request. That request was rejected in 1992, during the debate on the Charlottetown accord. Indeed, the issue of Quebec holding 25% of the seats in the House was included in the Charlottetown accord, but 55% of Quebecers voted against the accord. Since then, no individual or organization from Quebec has approached the House of Commons to get this 25% level, which had been rejected in 1992. Even the National Assembly does not support the idea.

Therefore, why do Bloc members want to support something which was rejected by Quebec itself, by the citizens of Quebec? Today, even the National Assembly does not support this request. This is because a majority of Quebecers understand that there are constitutional guarantees to ensure they have a minimum number of MPs. This is why it is very important to support our bill on democratic representation, which will result in an increase in the number of seats for those provinces whose population is growing. It is very simple.

Business of Supply

We do not understand why Bloc members want something that could reduce Quebec's current representation. According to our numbers, Quebec will have more seats, possibly two, even with the guarantee of a minimum level. So, Quebecers will continue to have a guaranteed presence here in the future. Quebec's representation in the House will have more weight. Indeed, its population is smaller, but the province will have more seats. We support that.

This is why I am urging my colleagues to support our bill to add seats based on the population, and to also support a constitutional guarantee to ensure that the province of Quebec keeps 75 MPs, regardless of its population. This is how we support Quebec. The Bloc's proposal does not work and it does not reflect the will of Quebecers and Canadians.

• (1250)

Mr. Daniel Pailé (Hochelaga, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the will of Quebecers is expressed through those who represent them. There are 125 members in the National Assembly in Quebec, and there are 75 members of Parliament in this House, 49 of who are against this bill. Thus, we have 87% of elected representatives from Quebec who oppose this Conservative scheme.

I am deeply concerned about Canada's public finances when I realize the President of the Treasury Board has trouble with basic math. As a matter of fact, 75 over 308 is 24.3%, and 75 over 338 is 10% less. He should know that, in his capacity as President of the Treasury Board. Canada is not being well managed if he cannot do basic math. He would need to have eight new members from Quebec, out of 30, or 10 new members, on top of the 30 that are provided by this bill if he wants things to add up.

The member, who is making excellent progress in French, is in urgent need of a basic math course.

Hon. Stockwell Day: Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my colleague for his kind words on the progress I am making in French, but I have another problem.

My colleague is telling us that Bloc members still reflect the will of the people in Quebec. I wonder why they oppose our bill that sets mandatory sentences for criminals who commit very serious crimes or reoffend. I wonder why they are against our bill to introduce mandatory sentences for criminals who commit crimes against children.

Does he think he is representing the majority opinion in Quebec? It is the same about this. I am convinced that Quebec citizens want to keep the 75 members they are guaranteed in the House of Commons.

• (1255)

[English]

Mr. Dennis Bevington (Western Arctic, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I want to engage my hon. colleague, the President of the Treasury Board and Minister for the Asia-Pacific Gateway, in the subject of regionality.

I come from a riding where there is one representative for an entire region. In the 1970s the riding was split and, because of regionality, one riding was given to the eastern Arctic at the time under the same jurisdiction. Now that there are two separate territories, there are two separate seats. Under regionality four seats are given to Prince Edward Island. That is a very important point.

Does the minister not agree that we are in a confederation where every region has to have representation that is adequate for its requirements regardless of the population distribution? The representation of a region in a confederation is highly important.

Hon. Stockwell Day: Mr. Speaker, I agree with my hon. colleague on the point he has made.

I believe that particular principle is coincidental with the principle of representation by population. It was addressed in a very good judgment written by Justice Beverley McLachlin before she was appointed to the Supreme Court of Canada; in fact she was in the court of British Columbia at the time.

The subject of strict interpretation of representation by population was brought before her. Her judgment said that is the basic principle by which we operate, but she also talked about the uniqueness, size, breadth and distribution of population in Canada itself. She said that the goal must first be representation by population but then there is some room to allow for a difference in number of voters within a particular constituency to reflect some of the unique qualities of Canada.

As to some of the remarks my friend made relating to the Arctic, certainly that judgment would have some bearing on them and would need to be taken into consideration.

Mr. Laurie Hawn (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to speak to today's opposition day motion, which has been moved by the member for Joliette.

The issue before the House today is fundamentally important for our democracy, and that is representation in the House of Commons.

All hon. members and indeed all Canadians can agree that representation in this House must be fair. This means two things: it must be fair for every province in the federation and it must be fair for all Canadians regardless of the province in which they live. Our government introduced the democratic representation act on April 1 to bring fairness back to the people's House.

In a country as vast and diverse as ours, finding that balance is not always easy. Competing equities must be considered to ensure fairness. Nevertheless fairness for all provinces and for all Canadians must be the overriding objective. That is why the motion put forward by the member for Joliette is so misguided and why I urge all members to vote against the motion today.

I will focus my remarks on the historic representation of Quebec in the House of Commons and provide some background on the distribution of seats in the House. This will provide better context for our debate and demonstrate that the member's motion is, in fact, unnecessary.

In contrast, Bill C-12, the democratic representation act, strikes the right balance for the democratic representation of all provinces and all Canadians.

Business of Supply

At Confederation, the principle of representation by population in the House of Commons was paramount. It was this principle, combined with equality of reasonable representation in the Upper House, that made the union of Canada in one dominion possible.

The Constitution Act of 1867 reflected the principle of representation by population, or rep by pop as it is commonly known. It included a formula for readjusting seats in the House every 10 years.

That formula allocated 65 seats to Quebec and allocated seats to other provinces in proportion to their respective populations. In other words, representation in the House was rep by pop, with the average riding population in Quebec used as the standard to determine the representation of other provinces. The Confederation formula also included protection against a loss of seats if a province's population were to rapidly decline.

Although the seat allocation formula has changed over time, the following two elements of the formula have remained stable since Confederation. The first element is that there is an allocation of seats based on population. It is pretty simple. The second is that there is protection against the loss of seats for provinces whose populations are in relative decline. That is also pretty simple. That formula has never provided a guaranteed percentage of seats for any single province.

I cannot imagine that anyone in this House disputes that smaller provinces may need more seats than may be justified by their populations, to help enhance their representation in this House, and we have heard some examples. However, by definition, this means that other provinces will have a reduced representation.

Again we are faced with a question of fairness. Is it fair for smaller provinces to be under-represented or for a larger province that already has a significant proportion of seats to accept some under-representation to enhance the representation of smaller provinces?

I love P.E.I. for many reasons. It is a beautiful, historic province. It has tremendously friendly people, who were wise enough to elect a great representative in our fisheries minister. I envy P.E.I. MPs. In Edmonton Centre, I have as many constituents as the entire population of Prince Edward Island. Each P.E.I. MP has about 35,000 constituents. In round numbers, I have 130,000. I really envy them because if I had that few constituents, I would know them all on a first-name basis.

It is the same with the seats in the north, obviously granting its size.

But there are some common sense reasons there could be some disparity in the number of seats. P.E.I. is an example and the north is another example.

Under the current formula, P.E.I. gets three of its four seats from seat protections rather than population size. According to a strict rep by pop formula, P.E.I. is over-represented in this House, but I believe we could all agree that this is fair in a House of more than 300 members.

The same rationale does not apply to a province that already has 18 times as many seats as P.E.I. and the second largest number of

seats in the House. Yet this is exactly what the member for Joliette would ask us to support.

To look at it another way, Quebec is the second-largest province in the country, and yet the populations of its ridings are much smaller than the medium-sized provinces of Alberta and British Columbia. Is it fair that it takes an average of at least 17,000 more Albertans to elect an MP from that province than it does to elect an MP from the province of Quebec?

Now to return to the terms of the motion before the House today, the member for Joliette suggests that Quebec members of Parliament must hold at least 25% of the seats in this House. Members will recall that such a 25% guarantee was proposed as part of the Charlottetown Accord in 1992.

● (1300)

Let us remember that Quebec's share of the provincial population at that time, according to the 1991 census, was slightly over 25%. Yet the Charlottetown Accord was unsuccessful and was ultimately rejected by the people of Quebec. The demographic reality has changed significantly since 1992, and it continues to change. That makes a 25% guarantee even more unrealistic. According to the 2006 census, Quebec's share of the provincial population has fallen to slightly less than 24%. Based on currently available population projections, its share will fall further to 23.2% in the 2011 census and further still to 21.6% by the 2031 census.

That could change. There is no question about that. At the same time, we are experiencing rapid and significant population growth in other provinces, which are prevented from gaining seats that recognize their growth. To support the motion before the House today would further penalize these growing provinces and further undermine the principle of fairness that must underscore representation in the House.

Let us look at one final example. If the current formula is not changed, after the 2011 census, British Columbia will only have about half the seats Quebec has, even though it will have close to 60% of its population. Looked at another way, Quebec will have twice as many seats as B.C., but its share of seats will be greater than its share of the provincial population. In contrast, B.C.'s share of seats will be less than its share of the population by an even larger margin. As a result, an MP from B.C. would be called upon to represent 15,000 more constituents on average than an MP from Quebec.

To accept the member for Joliette's motion, more than 75 seats would have to be given to Quebec to give it 25% of House seats, widening these disparities even more. I am not sure any Canadians, whether they are from British Columbia, Quebec or any other province, would consider this fair, and I do not believe that any member could think so either. Under Bill C-12, even after the adjustments that are suggested, Quebec will still have fewer constituents per riding than the growing provinces of Ontario, British Columbia and Alberta.

We can all agree that fairness should be the cornerstone of representation in the House of Commons. For that representation to be fair, seats in an elected assembly must be based primarily on population and reflect the demographic realities of our country. Compromises must also be made to ensure effective representation for all Canadians across Canada. Bill C-12 would balance our desire to bring the House closer to the fundamental democratic principle of representation by population while continuing to protect the seat counts in slower-growing provinces such as Quebec.

Simply stated, the motion before the House today would take us even further from that core democratic principle. That is why I oppose the motion and I urge all other hon. members to do the same.

• (1305)

Mr. Maurice Vellacott (Saskatoon—Wanuskewin, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have some questions for my hon. colleague. I have appreciated the tenor of the debate so far and particularly the comments he made. This may have been said before, but the Mowat Centre called Canada “one of the worst violators of citizen equality”. We have the NDP and the Bloc wanting to make that worse. They are basically rejecting the concept of representation by population.

Can he explain to us or at least in brief respond in terms of the principled approach our government is taking to strike some balance here? Can he maybe give us a little bit of detail in respect to that?

Mr. Laurie Hawn: Mr. Speaker, our government believes that, to the greatest extent possible, each Canadian's vote should carry equal weight. That is the principle behind Bill C-12. It would be violated by passage of the hon. member's motion today.

We want to restore the principle of representation by population to the House of Commons. Every few years, of course, it is going to get a little bit out of whack because some provinces grow and some provinces do not. Hopefully no province shrinks, but the rate of growth is obviously different. It is simply a matter of fairness and a matter of making sure every Canadian's vote carries equal weight, whether that Canadian is from British Columbia, Alberta, Ontario, Quebec or wherever.

[Translation]

Ms. Diane Bourgeois (Terrebonne—Blainville, BQ): Mr. Speaker, did the member who spoke before me actually read the Bloc Québécois motion, which does not at all attack greater representation for the three Canadian provinces where population has increased significantly? It simply asks that Quebec's representation, granted at the very beginning, in 1867, under the British North America Act, be respected. Has he read the motion?

[English]

Mr. Laurie Hawn: Mr. Speaker, I have read the entire motion. It is quite short and to the point.

The simple fact is that Quebec's interests have been represented by the House of Commons. Its seat count has increased from 65 to 75 over the years. As Canada's population changes, as demographic changes take place, it is necessary to readjust the number of seats in the provinces, to preserve fairness and to preserve the equality of votes for every Canadian.

It is a very simple formula of rep by pop. It is followed around the world in virtually all democracies that I am aware of. This is not

Business of Supply

taking anything away from Quebec. We are preserving what Quebec has. We are merely recognizing that other parts of the country are growing more quickly than Quebec, and Canadians in those parts of the country deserve to have equal representation with their member of Parliament.

For me to have 130,000 constituents and for somebody in Quebec to have 105,000 constituents would necessarily result in a little bit different level of service. It is a matter of providing fairness and equal service to Canadians regardless of where they live.

• (1310)

[Translation]

Ms. Diane Bourgeois (Terrebonne—Blainville, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I will be sharing my time with the member for Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques.

Today, we are discussing the following motion presented and amended by the Bloc Québécois:

That the House denounce the fact that the government seeks to marginalize the Quebec nation by introducing a bill to decrease Quebec's political weight in the House, and call on the government not to enact any legislation that would reduce Quebec's current representation in the House of Commons of 24.35% of the seats.

This motion is in response to the fact that the Conservative Party has introduced, on three occasions, a bill or motion to diminish the political weight of Quebec in this House.

The Conservatives recognized the Quebec nation to some extent. However, they have since systematically attacked this nation and rejected any proposal to give tangible expression to that recognition.

They introduced Bill C-12, which would further marginalize the Quebec nation in Canada.

In 1867, when the Canadian Confederation or federation came together, Quebec's weight was 36% in terms of seats. At this rate, we will have only 22.4% of the seats in 2014. This government will no longer engage in open federalism but will be muzzling the provinces.

Every time a bill has been introduced to reduce Quebec's political weight in the House, Quebec's National Assembly has taken a stand and unanimously demanded withdrawal of the bill. First, there was Bill C-56, then Bill C-22, and now Bill C-12. More than 85% of Quebec's elected representatives are against this bill. We must examine the current provisions.

Since 1867, what steps have reduced Quebec's political weight?

The British North America Act enacted in 1867 contained two extremely important sections.

Section 51 established the House of Commons' representation system and said that a province would maintain the same number of seats even if its relative population decreased. And we should not forget that when Upper and Lower Canada were united, each had the same number of seats.

Business of Supply

Then there is section 52:

The Number of Members of the House of Commons may be from time to time increased by the Parliament of Canada, provided the proportionate Representation of the Provinces prescribed by this Act is not thereby disturbed.

Two sections in the British North America Act, sections 51 and 52, ensured that seat distribution amongst the provinces in the House could be changed only by London and it ensured that the number of seats would remain the same, even if a province's population dropped. That was in 1867.

In 1907, the territories became an exception to these rules. Federal territories gained the right to be represented in the House even though their population did not warrant it under proportional representation.

•(1315)

Then, in 1915, Prince Edward Island joined. It had a small population. It asked for additional protection, which was added in 1915 and stated that a province could not have fewer members of the House of Commons than senators. This protection has been maintained over the years. The changes between 1867 and 1915 gave way to other means of stemming the loss of seats for provinces with slow population growth.

Section 51 of the act that was patriated along with the Constitution says that there is a ceiling. I think that it is important to point out that for some provinces, population losses in demographic terms were ignored. Furthermore, at the time, London had the power to amend the act. Now that the Constitution has been patriated, we have had the power since 1949 to amend it and to make our own laws here in the House of Commons, as long as seven provinces representing 50% of the population plus one agree with any constitutional change. I think that is important because there is some doubt about whether the current Conservative government has the right to introduce a change to the Representation Act in terms of ridings. Does it have that right? The government says that it does. It is hiding behind democracy and claiming that its proposal would ensure better representation for the people of three provinces. However, we do not believe that that is its real agenda. It is trying to accommodate certain provinces to ensure that the people of those provinces elect federalist Conservative and Liberal members and that, as a result, Quebec loses its political weight in this federation. The Conservative government is trying to raise the ceiling used to calculate each province's population-based representation because it wants to give more seats to the provinces with the fastest-growing populations.

Since 1985, twelve additional seats have been given to six provinces with low demographic growth rates. Today, seven provinces benefit from the system that was brought in, but as everyone knows, Alberta, Ontario and British Columbia are at a disadvantage. The Conservative government can find a legitimate way to fix the problem, but it must protect provinces whose population is declining relative to the whole. We believe that, by focusing too closely on approximating pure representation by population, the government is in danger of violating paragraph 42 (1)(a), which, as we saw earlier, enshrines modified proportionate representation.

As I said earlier, since 1982, when the Constitution was patriated, the consent of at least seven provinces has been required to make

changes to representation in the House of Commons. We believe that if the government wants to bring in representation by population, it will have to seek the support of seven provinces representing half of Canada's population because this matter falls under the Constitution of Canada.

•(1320)

[English]

Mr. Brad Trost (Saskatoon—Humboldt, CPC): Mr. Speaker, after 2006 new members of Parliament were elected to the House of Commons. I asked some of my friends and acquaintances in the province of Quebec why the Quebec City region had changed. They told me that it was because the Bloc Québécois was predominantly taking orders from Montreal and Montreal only, and that the people in and around Quebec City wanted their own voice. They did not want members of Parliament taking orders from Montreal when they lived in Quebec City.

This was demonstrated by a report that the Bloc Québécois commissioned. If the principle needs to be applied that for Canada as a whole 25% of the seats are to be reserved for the province of Quebec, should not the same principle then be applied to the province of Quebec and various regions then be given a certain allotment of seats so that regions such as the Quebec City region be not swamped by the Montreal region?

Is the hon. member in favour of giving 25% of the seats in the province of Quebec to the Quebec City region?

[Translation]

Ms. Diane Bourgeois: Mr. Speaker, what I like about these Conservative members is that they confuse apples with oranges. The hon. member missed the point. In fact, I think he did not even read the report coming out of the Quebec City region at the time. That is not at all what we were talking about. We were talking only about representation in terms of political parties. He can laugh all he wants, but he just wasted a lot of time mixing things up.

We want the Conservatives to know that we are not against them increasing representation in the three provinces that need it. Quebec City can remember that some day. If Quebec's political weight in the House of Commons is decreased he just might lose his Conservative MPs. Then perhaps he will realize that we do not mix our apples and oranges.

[English]

Mr. David Tilson (Dufferin—Caledon, CPC): Mr. Speaker, my colleague from the Bloc Québécois has spent a great deal of time talking about the past. She also made an interesting statement toward the end of her intervention, which was that we should protect the provinces whose population is declining. So I maintain she should be looking in the future. If any other province in this great country decided to say its population was increasing, in other words, if the roles were reversed to what she is saying Quebec is now, if a province was to be guaranteed even though its population may decline, would she agree to that? Or would she simply say no, it is all about Quebec?

Business of Supply

[Translation]

Ms. Diane Bourgeois: Mr. Speaker, the Bloc Québécois members in this House have never been against justice for Canadians and Canadian provinces. It is only fair to give representation to provinces whose population is increasing because of a population explosion. We have nothing against that. However, what is good for the goose is good for the gander. In an effort to be fair to the three provinces whose populations are exploding, are we being fair to Quebec, which will lose political weight in this House? Is this fair to Quebec and will Quebec end up keeping what the National Assembly is asking for, namely the equivalent of 24.35% of its weight in this House? I am asking the hon. member.

They do not seem to realize that we are currently not fighting against them, but fighting to continue to exist and to maintain our political weight in this House. What the government is trying to do through the bill that will be introduced is to reduce this political weight and take away our ability to intervene as a nation. It is only natural that the francophone Quebec nation be represented at the same level in the House and keep what it was granted in 1867. We have to be able to maintain our political weight. I find it quite odd that they are trying to pretend we are saying things that are not entirely true.

• (1325)

Mr. Claude Guimond (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques, BQ): Mr. Speaker, when the constituents of Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques elected me in 2008, they did so knowing full well that I would defend their interests at all costs in this House. I have often stood up to denounce government decisions that went against the needs of my constituents and that of Quebecers. I want you to know that I keep the promises I make to my constituents and that I will continue doing so with no strings attached. That is why I stand up again today because I strongly disagree with the Conservative government's desire to reduce Quebec's political weight in this parliament. I will give concrete examples of what could happen if the bill were adopted.

Considering the importance that members opposite give to regional development, and considering that the Bloc Québécois is the only party that suggests ideas and concrete solutions to enrich and expand regions, they would be the ones with the most to lose if Bill C-12, which we are criticizing today, were adopted. Not only would it be detrimental to the regions, but also to Quebec, which would experience major losses. Without the important contribution of the Bloc Québécois or Quebec's substantial representation in this House, I cannot imagine where we would be with issues like the environment, unemployment insurance, the forestry crisis, land use, and so on. These are concrete examples of the issues that could be affected.

Considering that there are huge differences between the interests of Quebec and western Canada—of which we have concrete examples every day in this House—and that for political reasons, the Conservatives and the Liberals prefer, first and foremost, to meet demands from western Canada, it is crucial that Quebec maintain its current political weight. That is the minimum. Oil sands and gifts to the oil industry and banks are not part of our everyday life nor so we ever want them to be.

Although Quebec's National Assembly and the members of the Bloc Québécois are asking the federal government to provide timely assistance to people affected by the forestry crisis, the Conservatives insist on subsidizing the automotive industry, mainly concentrated in Ontario, with billions of dollars, and give crumbs to Quebec and its forestry industry. Without the strong presence of the Bloc Québécois, or with Quebec's political weight reduced, we can only imagine the emphasis this House would put on this issue. It would be tragic.

Injustices like those are much too numerous. One need only think of maintaining and developing the regions, such as the eastern part of Quebec, where my riding is located. The Conservatives have the opportunity to make amends and to allocate the necessary funds, for instance to pursue a project submitted under the broadband Canada program, designed to favour the expansion and the availability of communication services like high-speed Internet to the greatest number of communities, mainly rural ones like my own. And yet, the Conservatives keep on postponing the announcement of the grants. As a result, far too many citizens, businesses and communities are left hanging. Are the Conservatives aware of the fact that rural citizens are not second-class citizens? What would become of them if Quebec could not count on its significant proportion of members in the House of Commons?

With a reduced Quebec representation in the House, there is no doubt that the Conservatives and the Liberals would more often create smokescreens with the sole objective of marginalizing the Quebec nation, which they are constantly trying to do.

With Quebec's political weight reduced, how would we press the Conservative government to compensate Quebec by granting the \$2.2 billion it is owed for harmonizing its sales tax with the federal one, even though it compensated Ontario to the tune of \$4.3 billion?

• (1330)

I will give another example. It is the same for the maritime provinces, which were each granted almost \$1 billion in 1997. However, not a dime was given to Quebec, which was the first province to harmonize its tax.

I will say it again: Quebec must, at least, maintain its current political weight in this House because the interests of Quebec and Canada differ too much on too many issues.

Here is another example regarding agriculture. As our leader so aptly put it, there are two distinct agricultural models in Canada: the Quebec model and the one developed in western Canada. Of course, be they Quebecers or Canadians, producers and consumers share certain common objectives. Agricultural producers from Quebec and Canada agree, for instance, on the dire need for farm income support, a matter on which the Prime Minister's government seems to lack a sense of urgency. There are also fundamental differences between the agricultural models in Quebec and Canada.

Business of Supply

In Canada, the majority of producers prefer to rely on exportation, but in Quebec, because of the type of productions and small farms we have, the main stay is production for the local market, which explains the need for Quebec to build on the development of collective mechanisms like supply management. If we want to uphold the idea that we should rely upon the development of collective mechanisms, it is important and crucial that Quebec have a strong representation in this House.

One has to draw the same conclusion as concerns the environment. In Copenhagen, Canada took a rigid position in defending the tar sands at the expense of all the efforts Quebec has made since 1990. How could we fight for Quebec's interests without the support of a solid proportion of Quebec members in the House, and not token Quebec government members who are unfortunately all too many in this House?

These examples show how much Quebec stands to lose if Bill C-12 is passed.

The interests of Quebec are at stake, of course, but so are the interests of the regions in Quebec. We should avoid at all costs weakening their political weight, so that they can still have an important voice in political fora to be able to express their concerns. Not to mention the place that Quebec as a nation has been given in this House. As my colleagues have eloquently explained, the recognition of Quebec as a nation has no meaning for this House. And the decision to decrease the weight of Quebec in the House of Commons is just the last in a long series of examples that show this.

Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia (Lac-Saint-Louis, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I listened very carefully to the arguments put forth by my colleague from the Bloc Québécois. It seems to me that his arguments had nothing to do with supporting the idea that Quebec must hold at least 25% of the seats in the House of Commons. He spoke in favour of Quebec independence instead. He believes that if Quebec was not part of the Canadian federation, it could put all of its resources in one sector or another.

I want to ask the member a very specific question. Where does this 25% figure come from? What is at the core of the resolution by the National Assembly was discussed at the time of the Charlotte-town accord. My colleague's party was opposed to that accord. Where does that figure come from? Some could say that it goes back to 1867, but that was for the Senate. A senate is different from a house of representatives. For example, it is as if we applied to the House of Representatives in the United States the same proportions used for each state in the U.S. Senate. The state of Florida would have only 4% of the seats in the House of Representatives. It seems to me that the member and his party are putting forth some pretty relativistic arguments.

• (1335)

Mr. Claude Guimond: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague for his question. I am happy to hear that he felt I gave a speech in favour of Quebec's independence. It is true and I am pleased to be recognized as a sovereigntist because that is what I am.

I believe that my colleague misunderstood the essence of my speech, which was a heartfelt appeal from a politician living in rural Quebec. Any politician from rural Canada could have made the same speech if they felt their political weight was slipping away from

them. That is exactly what I wanted to say in my speech, but unfortunately, all too often, some members in the House do not listen to what is being said and say whatever they feel like saying.

[*English*]

Ms. Olivia Chow (Trinity—Spadina, NDP): Mr. Speaker, in my riding of Trinity—Spadina, the last census, which was done in 2006, showed me representing over 115,000 residents. By now, I probably represent 130,000 residents in the riding of Trinity—Spadina.

I believe the principle of representation by population is extremely important. Would the member of the Bloc Québécois support the principle of representation by population and increasing the number of seats for the under-represented provinces of Ontario, British Columbia and Alberta?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Claude Guimond: Mr. Speaker, as many of my colleagues have been saying all day, we are not opposed to the member's proposal.

We simply want the House of Commons to acknowledge, once and for all, that in 2006 it voted to recognize the Quebec nation. We also want it to acknowledge Quebec's right, as a minority within Canada, to have historic representation so that its weight will not be reduced and it will be adequately recognized in the House. That is all we are asking for in this motion and what we ask for every single day.

Mr. Brian Murphy (Moncton—Riverview—Dieppe, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to take part in this debate. First, I would like to mention that I will be sharing my time with the hon. member for Brossard—La Prairie.

I will start by reading the motion before us:

That the House denounce the fact that the government seeks to marginalize the Quebec nation by introducing a bill to decrease Quebec's political weight in the House, and that it affirm that Quebec Members of Parliament, who represent a nation, must hold at least 25 percent of the seats in the House.

An amendment to this motion has been moved, but discussions today will focus on the motion.

I agree with the part of the motion which states that "the government seeks to marginalize". I would say that it seeks to marginalize every region in the country. The people of New Brunswick are very proud to have an Acadian population and they believe that, through its actions, the government is seeking to marginalize not only the Acadian nation, but also the regions of Canada, including the Maritimes.

I would now like to address the rest of the motion, with which I do not agree. I am a proud federalist. I come from New Brunswick, this country's only bilingual province. I believe in this country, in Canada.

This motion benefits Quebec only and marginalizes the rest of the country. The Bloc Québécois' motion and this government's actions are marginalizing me as a politician from the Maritimes.

Business of Supply

● (1340)

[English]

Let me explain. Our country was founded in 1867. The four founding provinces were Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, Quebec and Ontario. If I hear catcalls and it is a joke to talk about the founding of our country, if it is a joke to talk about four founding provinces coming into a deal and having expectations—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Deputy Speaker: Order, please. I will let members know that there will be an opportunity for questions and comments after the member has done his speech. If members could hold themselves until that time, they can ask whatever question the like of the hon. member.

The hon. member for Moncton—Riverview—Dieppe.

Mr. Brian Murphy: Thank you for coming to my rescue. I so needed that, Mr. Speaker.

When I talk about New Brunswick, when I talk about the maritime provinces, I do not need any defence. I can say to anyone that I am a very proud Maritimer, I am a very proud Canadian and I believe in the principles of our country and the ones on which they were founded.

Some of the principles the country was founded on, which came from the four founding partners, were principles of fairness and principles not to marginalize other regions of the country.

I said in French at the beginning of my remarks that I found it disconcerting that the Bloc Québécois members always bring forward motions that would marginalize the rest of Canada. That is what they believe. They do not want to be part of Canada, so they want to marginalize any aspect of Canada. There is a certain honesty in that, but I do not agree with them. I also do not agree, however, with language that comes from the other side with respect to the great federal system that we have or had.

What I think is important to—

* * *

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Mr. Rick Casson (Lethbridge, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. There have been negotiations among the parties and I believe if you were to seek it, you would find unanimous consent for the following motion. I move:

That, notwithstanding any Standing Order or usual practice of the House, on Tuesday, April 20, 2010, Statements by Ministers, pursuant to Standing Order 33, shall be taken up at 3 p.m.

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

● (1345)

BUSINESS OF SUPPLY

OPPOSITION MOTION—REPRESENTATION OF QUEBEC IN THE HOUSE OF COMMONS

The House resumed consideration of the motion, and of the amendment.

Mr. Brian Murphy (Moncton—Riverview—Dieppe, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the government bill is really the subject of this motion. It seeks to increase House seats by 30, which would probably give an advantage to some provinces because they have grown and they would have a larger number of seats.

The principle of representation by population, that everybody's vote should count the same, either has to be a pure principle followed exactly to the letter, or it has to take into account variations that come from our foundation as a nation, our special interests within a nation and the aspect of geography, which is one of the key components of our country.

If we were to have representation by population purely, then some vast regions of our country would be impossible to represent because the number of people required to make, let me say 108,000 electors, would be so vast that it would be half of northern Canada. We have already de facto decided that we will make exceptions to the representation by population principle.

Therefore, when I hear members, including the Minister of State for Democratic Reform, talk about it being a pure principle and how could anybody be against it, I want to remind them that we have already made exceptions to it. We have to take into account that there are special circumstances to special regions, special populations, special language groups and special historical facts.

I was attempting to outline that people as eminent as Donald Savoie in my region have talked about the diminution of the influence of Maritime Canada within the federation. I am sorry that defending where I come from upsets people. As a Maritimer, I hearken back to the days when the Maritime provinces were the economic engine of this great federation, and that day will surely come again. If Danny Williams has his way, it could come tomorrow or the next day.

If this federation is a give and take relationship, then we all have to be respectful. I am being very respectful when I say for my members from British Columbia, Ontario and Alberta that it is a wonderful thing that their communities have grown and contributed to the economic engine that is Canada. It is a wonderful thing to support representation by population. It is also a wonderful thing to respect the old partners of Confederation, special language groups and the geographical fact that we are a dispersely populated country.

If we have already made exceptions to the rule of representation by population, the government saying that an exact principle has to be followed in every case does not hold water.

Business of Supply

Let us look at our neighbour to the south. Would we say, as a characterization, that Americans are overly generous when it comes to the democratic representation principle, that they would say on the larger stage that they do not care about democratic equality? They have fought wars on these issues. Yet in the United States of America, Rhode Island has two senators just like the great state of California. The House of Representatives is a pure representation by population body, but the senate, which some would argue is the more powerful body, is not representation by population.

Perhaps we have to go back to the drawing board and decide what we want in this bicameral state we call Canada. We know the Senate is either something that the government really wants to get rid of totally, or it is something that it wants to reform into an elected representation by population body, so we would have two of us, as if one is not enough, or we decide we will have one rep by pop body and one Senate representing regions, ethnicities and languages, a historical fact upon which our great country was founded.

That is the real debate we should be having in the House. We should not be debating some government drive-by bill written in a Tim Hortons somewhere with a camera on saying that the government is doing democratic reform now. The government is doing it because in 19 Conservative ridings out of 30, the Conservatives would be gaining an advantage.

The bill that this motion is the subject of is nothing but political opportunism. For that reason, we want real democratic reform from that side, not just another press conference.

• (1350)

Hon. James Moore (Minister of Canadian Heritage and Official Languages, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for wasting 10 minutes making the most obvious and unoriginal observations about representation by population I have ever heard. He talks about being respectful. Of course there is a debate to be had about democratic reform. However, over 13 years, the Liberals did not offer any solutions to representation by population or about any kind of democratic renewal reform of this Confederation.

My hon. colleague fails to recognize that while my province of British Columbia has six Senate seats, his home province of New Brunswick has 10 seats. Of course Labrador, with a population of about 30,000 people, has its own seat in the House of Commons. Of course that will be a fact. Of course the territories, which have smaller population bases, will have their own seats.

The question is how we get better balance. Pure representation by population per riding happens on a province-by-province basis as administered by Elections Canada, but the goal of our bill and of our government is to get us closer to where we have parity and representation in the House of Commons. We cannot have absolute pure. That is obvious. The hon. colleague does not have to waste 10 minutes of the House's time saying something that a grade 6 social studies student knows. We know that.

The question is this. When will the Liberal Party stand up against the Bloc Québécois and ensure that people in my home province of British Columbia, the fastest-growing province, can come closer to having a fair share and a fair set of voices in the House of Commons to represent their needs, just like other folks do?

What we do not need in the House is the member standing up and saying that we should be respectful. He started off his comments saying that the reason why they wanted to have more seats for British Columbia was so they could have less of a voice from people like Acadians and official-language minority Canadians. Shame on him for using those kinds of tactics.

Mr. Brian Murphy: Mr. Speaker, they are not my words. Donald Savoie has characterized the concerns of many Maritimers. If he does not respect Donald Savoie, then he does not deserve to get into grade 7. Mr. Savoie said:

As a Maritimer, I'm deeply offended and if we keep going down this road, I'm worried about the future of my country.

I know Donald Savoie well enough to know that he could be taken out of context. Maybe he is not against the principle of the bill. Maybe he is saying that we have to look at democratic reform and ensure that all the regions are respectfully represented in this nation. That includes the Senate and this place. No one wants to deny British Columbia, Alberta and Ontario the reward for the fact they are growing.

Hon. James Moore: Where is your bill? Thirteen years and no bill.

Mr. Brian Murphy: Mr. Speaker, I have been here four years and I have only been in opposition, so to pin that on me is not even a grade 6 antic. That member is typical of the other side. As good a person as he is, those members have an inculcated sense to insult people from the Maritimes or Quebec and imbue them with the culture of defeat that they think they have.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Diane Bourgeois (Terrebonne—Blainville, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I am glad to see that this member from New Brunswick is wedging a fight for the same reasons we do. The difference between him and I is that I am part of a nation that was recognized by this Parliament and this government. A nation should not be considered on the same level as just another region within Canada.

As a recognized nation, are we going to accept that our weight should be decreased in the House of Commons? Does the hon. member agree that the Quebec nation should keep 24.35% of the seats, something that should normally be a vested right?

Mr. Brian Murphy: Mr. Speaker, I know that, for historical reasons, Quebec is considered an important partner in the Confederation, but this motion has been moved by the Bloc, and the Bloc is against Canada. It does not want a single seat more for Quebec, because it does not want Quebec to have any seat at all in this federal institution.

Obviously, we are opposed to this motion, but at the same time, we are also against the attitude of the government that keeps going against the regions of Canada, therefore against me, and against the Maritime provinces.

Statements by Members

● (1355)

Mrs. Alexandra Mendes (Brossard—La Prairie, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to continue in the same vein as my colleague from Moncton—Riverview—Dieppe and say that we reject the premise of the Bloc's motion itself, in that the Bloc is opposed from the outset to any seat for Quebec in the House of Commons.

Since they formed a party, their primary objective has been to eliminate all trace of Quebec in the federation. We know that some provinces have expressed concerns in the past about their representation in the House of Commons. We are very sensitive to this and we do want, as my colleague said so clearly, to work toward finding the best way of representing the provinces and regions in the House of Commons.

What we do not want is to give the Bloc an excuse to try to divide us in this House on a particular point, without going through a complete study in committee of the overall situation of the provinces of the federation. The committee is supposed to give us an opportunity to put forward the various positions of the regions of Canada and see how we can maintain equity in all the provinces. We are talking not about equality, but about equity. All regions of Canada need to feel that they are represented in the House of Commons.

We are concerned by the Conservative bill because it will result in under-representation of Quebecers, based on the population of Quebec. We would like to make sure, in committee, that Quebec is represented fairly in the House of Commons.

But this problem—and we come back to this—is not limited just to Quebec. The federation is composed of provinces that are very distinct and very different from one another, with an unequal geographic distribution of the population. However, in order for all regions to be reflected in this House, it is absolutely necessary for exceptions to be made. Our colleagues from Newfoundland and Labrador, our colleagues from the Maritimes and our colleagues from the north have a job to do here for their constituents and their fellow citizens that is entirely honourable and necessary. It is therefore extremely important that this regional disparity, this geographic disparity, the immensity of this land, be taken into account, and that each region of the country be allowed representation that makes this diversity a concrete reality in our legislative debates.

Representation per person is in fact a fundamental principle of any democracy, and that principle ordinarily applies to the lower chamber. In our case, that is the House of Commons of Canada. But regional communities are often also represented in the upper chamber, which is our Senate, the Senate of Canada, where 25% of the seats are currently guaranteed to Quebec.

The Bloc cannot really believe in its motion, because when it was proposed during the Charlottetown referendum that this be entrenched in the Constitution, the Bloc opposed it. To the Bloc, the solution was simply to add no new seats to the House of Commons. As for the Senate, the Bloc does not even want it to exist. They are opposed to the principle of the Senate.

Every election, we have a party that fights to have Quebec get no seats in government at all. We must speak out against this feigned

indignation, because they would like to convince us they are fighting today for Quebec to have a place in Ottawa. Well, the leader of the Bloc Québécois has just completed a tour of Canada so he could once again promote independence for Quebec, even though independence for Quebec would mean eliminating every seat Quebec holds in the House of Commons, which is what we want to avoid at all costs.

The Speaker: I have to interrupt the hon. member, but she will have six minutes to complete her remarks after question period today.

* * *

[English]

AUDITOR GENERAL OF CANADA

The Speaker: Order. I have the honour to lay upon the table the spring 2010 report of the Auditor General of Canada with an addendum on environmental petitions from July 1 to December 31, 2010.

[Translation]

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

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

● (1400)

[English]

NATIONAL VICTIMS OF CRIME AWARENESS WEEK

Mrs. Kelly Block (Saskatoon—Rosetown—Biggar, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise in the House today to share a story of tragedy.

More than a month ago now, a good, honest, hard-working gentleman in my riding left his office to go home late on a Friday evening. At 12:35 a.m. the police received a report of an unconscious man lying on a street corner. When the police arrived on the scene, they found Bob Florence, a loved and respected reporter for *The StarPhoenix* conscious but unable to communicate. Bob has been in the hospital since the attack. His prognosis is unclear.

After spending his career chronicling the accomplishments of others in the community, Bob fell victim to a senseless and barbaric act of violence. This is only one tragic story of many, and one more example of why it is so important for us to move forward with National Victims of Crime Awareness Week and work to make our community safe for everyone.

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SNOWMOBILING ULTIMATE RIDER

Ms. Judy Foote (Random—Burin—St. George's, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to recognize a young man from my riding.

Statements by Members

Justin House from Stephenville was recently chosen as the Bombardier Recreational Products ultimate rider. Justin received this honour after going through a rigorous selection process that saw him chosen as a finalist from nearly 1,400 candidates from across North America. The final stage of the selection process involved a trip to Florida, where he had to speak about his passion for snowmobiling.

Through Justin and the distinction he has received from Bombardier, the Stephenville area of my riding will receive invaluable exposure among snowmobiling enthusiasts from across Canada and the United States. Snowmobiling is a big part of Justin's life. He is a past president and director with the Bay St. George Snowmobile/ATV Association and a current active volunteer. Justin's spare time is spent with his wife, Nancy, and children, Adam and Abbi.

I ask members of the House to join me in applauding Justin on achieving this notable title and the positive impact it will have on the Stephenville area.

* * *

[*Translation*]

MILLENNIUM SUMMIT

Ms. Meili Faille (Vaudreuil-Soulanges, BQ): Mr. Speaker, for a fourth year, the theme of poverty will be addressed at the Millennium Summit, specifically in the context of climate change and its devastating effect on populations. The fight against poverty is everyone's fight.

I would like to draw attention to the commitment of teachers from Vaudreuil-Soulanges, specifically Marie-Andrée Fournier, Thomas McCue, Annie Perrault, Suzanne Vallée and Benoit Tousignant. All through the school year, these teachers and their students have, on a human level, experienced international cooperation, community assistance and sharing. Every little counts and they have carried out a number of projects reflecting Quebec values.

Because of its values, Quebec cannot identify with a Canadian vision. This is why we condemn the lack of will of the Liberals and the Conservatives to make adequate investments so that the millennium development goals can be achieved.

Young people from our high schools are the future leaders of our society; as such, they will be accompanying me to the summit. My Bloc colleagues join with me in saluting their initiatives as citizens and in encouraging them to keep pursuing their social involvement.

* * *

[*English*]

G8 AND G20 SUMMITS

Ms. Olivia Chow (Trinity—Spadina, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the G8 and G20 summits mark a prime opportunity for Canada to show leadership on the world stage by taking bold action to combat poverty and inequality, by making real progress on climate change, and by transforming global economic and financial systems for a fair and sustainable world.

However, with this opportunity comes a responsibility to local residents and businesses in Trinity—Spadina. My constituents are saying, "Everyone I know is dreading the G20 summit. We all feel

like the Conservative government has zero respect for anyone in this city. How is the city supposed to function when the police plan on barring people and residents like myself from a big chunk of the downtown core during key festivals? Do armed guards and razor-wire fences say welcome to our city?"

The government must provide a bond now so that there will be speedy access to financial compensation for businesses that lose revenue, and for residential owners if their properties are damaged.

* * *

POLICE OFFICERS

Mr. Brent Rathgeber (Edmonton—St. Albert, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is my pleasure to stand and recognize the 100 police officers from the Canadian Police Association who are on Parliament Hill from Monday until Wednesday representing the 41,000 police personnel across Canada.

Police officers are the front line in the fight against crime, and we recognize their importance as we implement this government's safe streets and safe communities agenda.

These men and women serve their communities and their country with pride and dedication. Every day they demonstrate their courage as they strive to protect us and guarantee us the safety that we, as Canadians, so greatly cherish.

In the past twelve months we have lost eight valuable members of various police forces across Canada. I would like to extend my heartfelt condolences to the family members of these fallen officers who made the ultimate sacrifice serving their country and their communities.

On behalf of all parliamentarians, I salute these brave men and women who serve their country enforcing the laws made by this Parliament. Canadians are all very grateful.

* * *

●(1405)

REEL STUDENT PRODUCTIONS

Hon. Geoff Regan (Halifax West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to take this opportunity to congratulate an outstanding group of young students and award-winning filmmakers. The grade 5 class of Grosvenor Wentworth Park School, also known as Reel Student Productions, has already produced a half-dozen short films this year.

One of its films, *Alone*, won the Racism. Stop It! national video competition. What a worthwhile sentiment and competition that is.

I recently met with teacher Andrew Stickings and five students who were flown to Ottawa where their film was shown and where they were recognized for their outstanding achievement.

I know other members in the House would want to join me in giving Reel Student Productions two thumbs up.

*Statements by Members***MULTIPLE SCLEROSIS**

Mr. Larry Miller (Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I had the pleasure of taking part in the annual MS Walk this past Sunday in Owen Sound. I was a member of the Dream Team put together by Mandy Maisonneuve, a young mother of two sons who lives with MS. My sister and my family have also been personally touched by MS. I want to thank all those who come out to the walk every year to help raise funds for a cure and new treatments.

The MS Walk is a critical part of the fundraising efforts to fund research toward a cure for multiple sclerosis.

I also look forward to seeing the new experimental procedures for treatment of MS that have been developed in Europe brought to Canada. We need all public health authorities to help our Canadian patients gain access to these new treatments as soon as possible.

Every day three new families are told that one of their family members has MS. I know first-hand the toll this disease takes on the person with MS and how it affects the person's family.

It is urgent that we develop these new treatments and have them approved in Canada to give all MS patients more choices on how to get better.

* * *

[Translation]

NATIONAL VOLUNTEER WEEK

Ms. Diane Bourgeois (Terrebonne—Blainville, BQ): Mr. Speaker, in celebration of National Volunteer Week, with this year's theme, "Volunteer for life", I would like to thank all of my constituents who dedicate their time to volunteering. I remind them that volunteering is so valuable that it is essentially priceless. I would also like to congratulate two organizations in Terrebonne—Blainville who are celebrating important anniversaries in 2010.

The Centre d'action bénévole in Moulins is celebrating its 30th anniversary, and the people of Terrebonne-Blainville appreciate the work that this organization has done to improve the quality of life of the less fortunate. I would like to congratulate Gisèle Rivet in particular, because she has been volunteering her time at the centre from the beginning.

A.B.C. des Manoirs has been working in the field of literacy for 25 years now. This organization should be proud of its accomplishments in helping adults of all ages learn to read and write.

My Bloc Québécois colleagues and I would like to thank each and every volunteer.

* * *

[English]

VAISAKHI

Mr. Tim Uppal (Edmonton—Sherwood Park, CPC): Mr. Speaker, last week marked the Sikh celebration of Vaisakhi, which is the celebration of the birth of Sikhism as a collective faith.

Thousands of Canadians are celebrating throughout the country. For Sikhs it is an opportunity not only for celebration but for community service, which is a foundational principle of the faith.

Sikhs have a long and proud history of contributing to the community and to this country, such as Sikh Canadian soldiers serving in our armed forces and in Afghanistan.

Sikhism preaches remembrance of God, truthful living and selfless service.

It is therefore extremely saddening that a handful of individuals have tainted this celebration by indicating possible violence and glorifying some of Canada's listed terrorist organizations. This is not the proper way to convey a message.

This government stands with the Canadian Sikh community in condemning those individuals who have overshadowed this celebration of shared Canadian and Sikh values of equality, humanity and justice for all.

* * *

STEPHEN TURNER

Hon. Shawn Murphy (Charlottetown, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, last Saturday Prince Edward Island lost a unique, special and wonderful person when Stephen Turner died at the young age of 27.

Stephen Turner was unique in his passion for politics. He lived, ate and breathed politics 24 hours a day, seven days a week. He did so in a positive, friendly, almost jovial manner. He always had a smile on his face.

In his mind the only distinction between a Conservative and a Liberal was that the Conservatives were all very good people, whereas the Liberals were great people. He left this world with many friends and not a single enemy.

He worked as the executive assistant to P.E.I. education minister Doug Currie, where he will be greatly missed.

Less than four weeks ago, Stephen sat in the gallery enjoying every minute while listening to the debates. He knew most of the members here, although most of the members perhaps did not know him. He loved politics and everyone involved in the world of politics.

Although he lived a short life, he made a lasting impression on many people.

On behalf of this House, I offer to his father, David, his mother, Gloria, and his sister, Kathy Ann, our deepest sympathies.

* * *

● (1410)

[Translation]

VICTIMS OF CRIME

Mr. Daniel Petit (Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is important to acknowledge the fifth annual National Victims of Crime Awareness Week. Our government has implemented a number of initiatives that put the rights of law-abiding citizens ahead of criminals' rights. Our work is not finished.

Statements by Members

In fact, today we will be taking more measures to ensure that, from now on, murderers will actually serve their prison sentences for their heinous crimes. But just yesterday the leader of the Bloc Québécois said that his party has done a lot by adopting a constructive and rigorous attitude when it comes to justice.

We all know that the only thing the Bloc Québécois with its leftist ideology knows how to do is oppose our government's justice and crime initiatives. This is completely unacceptable. We believe that each victim counts. Our government is working to ensure that the rights of law-abiding citizens always come ahead of criminals' rights.

* * *

[English]

VICTORIA HARBOUR

Ms. Denise Savoie (Victoria, NDP): Mr. Speaker, for 20 years, Barry Hobbs has operated the Victoria Harbour Ferry. Few are better qualified than him to assess the threat to safety of a proposed mega-marina in Victoria's inner harbour. He sounded the alarm and he is not alone.

Seven thousand Victorians have signed a petition and many attended a harbourfront rally last Saturday, organized by the Save Victoria Harbour citizens group. At the rally, paddlers took to the water and physically mapped out the magnitude of a proposed marina, demonstrating how it would jut out into an already busy, small, active harbour. Adding a parking lot for luxury yachts to the mix invites disaster.

The Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities has the power to sink this mega-mistake and we are calling on him to do so.

* * *

NATIONAL VOLUNTEER WEEK

Mr. Greg Kerr (West Nova, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to recognize National Volunteer Week, a week in appreciation of the millions of Canadians from across the country who volunteer. In fact, 12.5 million Canadians give 2.1 billion hours of their time to volunteer each year. This is equivalent to over one million full-time jobs.

Our government fully recognizes the invaluable contributions volunteers make to our communities and to our country. That is why we are creating a new Prime Minister's award for volunteerism and why we added \$10 million to the new horizons for seniors program to support projects that help seniors mentor the next generation.

I want to give a great big thanks to the local volunteers throughout my constituency of West Nova and to the volunteers across the country. I thank them for coaching our sports team, for collecting donations for important causes and for cleaning up our local parks. I thank them for making Canada a better place to live.

* * *

[Translation]

ÉCOLE SECONDAIRE PIERRE-DUPUY

Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, today we have with us 10 students from Pierre-Dupuy high school in my riding.

As part of a school activity, these young people have traded their books and backpacks for a journalist's pen. They will have an opportunity to visit Parliament Hill, to see the work of members and to gain a better understanding of how our democratic system works.

The 10 novice journalists will then share what they have learned in *La plume étudiante*, a student newspaper that will be read by their classmates, teachers and parents.

The younger generation has a hunger for knowledge and understanding, and clearly has a keen interest in politics. The student newspaper at Pierre-Dupuy high school is a perfect example of that. The Bloc Québécois would like to welcome these young people and commend them for their initiative.

* * *

● (1415)

[English]

JUNO AWARDS

Mr. Pablo Rodriguez (Honoré-Mercier, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I had the great opportunity to attend the Juno Awards this weekend in St. John's, Newfoundland and Labrador. It was extraordinary.

I would like to congratulate the winners, the nominees and the artists who participated in this great event. We are all extremely proud of them.

[Translation]

The Juno Awards are a wonderful opportunity to reward the work of our artists, who make Canada so vibrant. That is the case of Michael Bublé, Bryan Adams, Andrea Lindsay, Metric, Alain Lefebvre, Bell Orchestre and many others. Thank you for giving us such a high calibre of music.

[English]

I assure the House that I will remember the great performances during the gala and the smiles on the faces of the winners. I will remember the energy at the Mile One Centre and on George Street and, yes, I will remember St. John's Airport which became a second home for a day, but it does not take away the beauty of the province and the warmth of its people.

St. John's is an amazing place to host the Junos. It is an amazing place for music. The Rock rocks.

* * *

FIREARMS REGISTRY

Mr. Greg Rickford (Kenora, CPC): Mr. Speaker, yesterday the Liberal leader came out against an attempt to scrap one of the most notorious Liberal billion dollar boondoggles: the wasteful long gun registry. Here is hoping this attempt to control his caucus will not be any more successful than his recent failures.

Oral Questions

Eight of his rural MPs voted for the private member's bill that would scrap the wasteful long gun registry. We know the Liberal leader has become accustomed to his caucus voting against him, but we have some advice for him on this one. He should support this bill.

The private member's bill before the House is a good bill, putting an end to the ineffective long gun registry, a legacy of Liberal waste and the criminalization of lawful gun owners. The Liberals can vote to either keep it or scrap it. There is no middle ground.

If the Liberal leader muzzles his MPs on this one, he will just prove once again that he is not in it for Canadians, he is just in it for himself.

ORAL QUESTIONS

[*Translation*]

ETHICS

Mr. Michael Ignatieff (Leader of the Opposition, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would remind the House that Mr. Jaffer was once the chair of the Conservative caucus. His wife was a minister. He was arrested by the police seven months ago, but the Prime Minister did not ask his minister for any explanations. We saw one warning sign after another for seven months, but he did nothing.

Can the Prime Minister explain his complete lapse in judgment for seven long months?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Mr. Jaffer is a private citizen. As soon as I received information regarding certain allegations, I forwarded them to the authorities as quickly as possible.

Mr. Michael Ignatieff (Leader of the Opposition, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, that explanation is not credible. He acted 10 days ago, when he could have done something seven months ago.

[*English*]

It just is not credible. The Prime Minister had seven months to investigate, seven months to take responsibility for his cabinet, seven months to ask the minister about her relations with the business affairs of her husband but he did nothing.

Why the blind faith? Did the Prime Minister prorogue his own judgment?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as I have said before, once I received some information related to the minister, that information was appropriately given to the authorities. We took the appropriate action and the authorities will fulfill their responsibilities.

Mr. Michael Ignatieff (Leader of the Opposition, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the affair remains covered in a smokescreen of secrecy.

The Prime Minister did not ask the minister any questions for seven months and did not explain why. He acted on second-hand information from some gumshoe and will not say why. He forced his own minister's resignation and will not say why. Each time he is asked a question in the House he will not say why.

When with the Prime Minister stand in this House and tell Canadians the truth?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as I have said before, it is not appropriate to comment on these things. When we received the serious information with some serious allegations, those were given to the RCMP, to the authorities, and it is up to them, obviously, to do with it what they will. We will await the outcomes of their actions.

* * *

• (1420)

[*Translation*]

TRANSPORTATION

Hon. Dan McTeague (Pickering—Scarborough East, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, hundreds of Canadians have been stranded in Europe for a number of days because flights have been cancelled.

Other countries have provided consular assistance to their citizens. However, our Minister of Foreign Affairs has only provided a web site.

Why is the minister not helping Canadians stranded in Europe? Why is he letting them fend for themselves? What about our emergency plan?

Hon. Lawrence Cannon (Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, naturally we empathize with all those in these circumstances because of this natural phenomenon.

As I mentioned yesterday, we are monitoring the situation very closely. As we speak, our embassies are on alert to provide assistance to those who truly need it. However, I am encouraged by signs that are emerging throughout Europe. At this time, about eight aircraft are bringing Canadians home.

[*English*]

Hon. Dan McTeague (Pickering—Scarborough East, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, stranded Canadians are not simply growing short on patience. They are growing short on money. Some require medical care. Families are coping with children, while others are having business concerns.

Hotels and rail companies are raising their prices. Flights need constant rebooking, with some requiring additional and costly charges. Seniors who may not be able to navigate through such circumstances are facing tough decisions.

Does the government have any contingency plan whatsoever to assist these Canadians in difficult times or are they just supposed to, as it were, fend for themselves?

Hon. Lawrence Cannon (Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, clearly we sympathize with all the travellers who have been inconvenienced by this volcanic eruption but, as members know, it is a natural phenomenon that nobody could have predicted.

Canadian officials are closely monitoring the ash cloud and I have directed officials at Canada's embassies overseas to help Canadians in practical ways. We are encouraged by signs that the situation might be improving. As we speak, eight aircraft are flying Canadians home from Europe.

Oral Questions

[Translation]

ETHICS

Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, one of his business partners said that Rahim Jaffer acted as a lobbyist. Yet, the Prime Minister stubbornly insists that this matter is no concern of the government. However, the fact is that, if Mr. Jaffer did act as a lobbyist, he had to lobby a minister or a secretary of State, which makes sense to me.

Could the Prime Minister tell this House whether Mr. Jaffer acted lobbied a minister or a secretary of State in his government?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have no information about any contract having been awarded to Mr. Jaffer. Naturally, there are rules in place governing lobbyists, and we expect lobbyists to adhere to these rules.

Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, lobbying does not mean one will automatically get a contract. One can act as a lobbyist without getting a contract. When the Prime Minister says that he expects people to adhere to the rules, I imagine that he expected his former status of women minister to adhere to the rules. It would appear, on the face of things, that she did not, given that she was fired.

Instead of merely stating generalities, could the Prime Minister stand up and tell me whether Mr. Jaffer lobbied one of his ministers or secretaries of State? That he should know.

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, ordinary citizens have to adhere to the lobbying rules. As for the government, it is responsible for making contract decisions. In this instance, I have no evidence of the existence of a contract, and certainly not of an improperly awarded one.

Mr. Pierre Paquette (Joliette, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the private investigator who alerted the Prime Minister seems to indicate that the Conservative couple are involved in a scheme to artificially inflate the value of a company with promises of government contracts and grants. Rahim Jaffer was supposed to get federal grants, and the former Conservative minister was contributing to the operation by encouraging a municipality to acquire the technology offered by her spouse's business partner.

Can the Prime Minister confirm that these are the allegations that he referred to the RCMP?

• (1425)

Hon. Christian Paradis (Minister of Natural Resources, CPC): Mr. Speaker, about ten days ago, the Prime Minister was informed of disturbing allegations that he referred to the proper authorities. The RCMP is now investigating and will draw its own conclusions.

Mr. Pierre Paquette (Joliette, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the same private investigator showed the CBC a list of businesses established overseas to launder money. According to this list, two companies registered in Panama, a notorious tax haven, carried the initials "RJ", the same as Rahim Jaffer. Meanwhile, the Conservative government wishes to implement a free trade agreement with Panama.

Why does the government want to implement an agreement that will be to the benefit of those who want to avoid the tax man?

Hon. Christian Paradis (Minister of Natural Resources, CPC): Mr. Speaker, allegations were referred to the proper authorities. The

RCMP is investigating and will draw its own conclusions. However, one thing is clear: these allegations do not concern government affairs, nor do they have anything to do with ministers, other members or senators. I want to emphasize that this is this party, on this side of the House, that set the toughest legislation on political party financing.

* * *

[English]

GRANT FOREST PRODUCTS

Hon. Jack Layton (Toronto—Danforth, NDP): Mr. Speaker, yesterday a company named Georgia-Pacific announced that it had taken control and that the government had approved its control of Grant Forest Products.

Even before it took over control, the new owner was already firing staff. People with up to 30 years of experience in one of our key industries were being told they would not be needed anymore.

Georgia-Pacific clearly had heard loud and clear the message sent out by the government when it approved the takeovers of Xstrata and Vale Inco, which is buy Canadian, fire the workers, no strings attached.

When will the Prime Minister protect Canadian jobs?

Hon. Tony Clement (Minister of Industry, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am unaware of the facts that the hon. member is relying on, but what I can tell the member is that Georgia-Pacific has in fact committed to maintaining the current workforce, quite frankly because it recognizes the value of the workers at Grant Forest Products. It is sourcing all timber for the Canadian business from Canadian forests, utilizing Canadian-based logging contractors while promoting sustainable forestry practices. Those are a part of the agreement that Georgia-Pacific has agreed to as part of this decision.

Hon. Jack Layton (Toronto—Danforth, NDP): Mr. Speaker, is this the start of a new practice? Are we going to actually have the government table the agreements of these foreign takeovers that have been made? Because it is about time that happened.

That is not what just happened here in the House. We had the minister quoting from the Georgia-Pacific press release, which I have here in my hand. That is what we have going on here.

Meanwhile, if the minister and his staff had bothered to take a look, they would find out that Georgia-Pacific is already firing workers contrary to this press release and contrary to any agreement.

When are we going to have a government that stands up for the people who built the wealth of this country?

Hon. Tony Clement (Minister of Industry, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the reason that it is in the Georgia-Pacific press release is because I insisted that the terms and conditions for approving the investment be public. That is why it is in the press release.

If the hon. member wants to talk about saving jobs, perhaps he should review some of his party's policies which increase taxes, drive away business, drive away investment and make the country poor.

That is not our agenda.

[Translation]

Hon. Jack Layton (Toronto—Danforth, NDP): Mr. Speaker, since the Investment Canada Act was passed, there have been 13,516 foreign takeovers in Canada. And how many have been refused by the various governments? Just one. The latest is the takeover of Grant Forest Products by Georgia-Pacific.

Will the Prime Minister guarantee that the terms and conditions will be met and that all employees who have been told they will lose their jobs will be kept on? Is he prepared to do that?

Hon. Tony Clement (Minister of Industry, CPC): Mr. Speaker, if the hon. member has heard something other than what I said, he should share it with me so that we can settle this matter.

[English]

But I can tell the House that, in fact, this is an agreement that this company has agreed to. It agreed to it and that is what made this particular deal of net benefit to Canada, which is a test in the legislation.

We believe in more investment. We believe in more companies increasing the number of jobs in this country. That is why we act for the benefit of Canada.

* * *

● (1430)

[Translation]

ETHICS

Mr. Mark Holland (Ajax—Pickering, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities said that he had met with Rahim Jaffer and personally received grant applications for three green infrastructure projects. The parliamentary secretary was delegated the authority to review these projects, not to decide which projects to fund.

If it is true that Mr. Jaffer's funding application was denied, was the minister informed? Did he make the decision? If not, who is managing this \$1 billion program?

[English]

Hon. John Baird (Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we have been very clear with respect to the issue the member raises. Serious allegations were brought forward to the Prime Minister's attention. He acted immediately, referring them to the relevant authorities. None of the allegations that were brought to the Prime Minister's attention had anything to do with government business.

With respect to the individual in question, no grants were either recommended or awarded.

Mr. Mark Holland (Ajax—Pickering, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, ministers and their staff are legally obligated to report any time they are lobbied. In a huge loophole, apparently parliamentary secretaries are not.

Oral Questions

So, the Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities delegated authority to review projects to his PS, someone who does not report his interactions with lobbyists, not even a meeting with an unregistered lobbyist who is past chair of the Conservative caucus, husband of a cabinet minister, and was trolling for government cash.

Accountability is not the title of a bill that the government passed and ignored. It is the actions taken right here.

Will the government turn over these proposals? Will it come clean? Will it tell us who it was lobbied by and when?

Hon. John Baird (Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, CPC): Mr. Speaker, if the member opposite has any allegations that he would like to make, I would encourage him to take them to the independent authority, but I doubt he will because any allegations that this member has ever raised have turned out to be totally incorrect and false.

Mr. Francis Valeriote (Guelph, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Federal Economic Development Agency for Southern Ontario, otherwise known as FedDev, needs to focus its limited resources on considering only projects of clear merit that will create long-term jobs for Ontarians.

Could the minister in charge of FedDev confirm that his director of operations, Andrew House, met with representatives of Sustainable Ventures Inc. last fall on behalf of a number of its clients?

Hon. Gary Goodyear (Minister of State (Science and Technology) (Federal Economic Development Agency for Southern Ontario), CPC): Mr. Speaker, ministers have an obligation to meet with Canadians. Mr. House did meet with the representatives, but they discussed the new fund, the southern Ontario development program. There were some projects talked about, but none of those projects received any funding.

Mr. Francis Valeriote (Guelph, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, normally when people vying for funding from FedDev met with Andrew House or other members of the minister's staff, they registered those meetings with the lobbying commissioner as the law requires. After all, as a former Conservative candidate in both 2006 and 2008, Mr. House knew the accountability act well.

Could the minister confirm that Rahim Jaffer's business partner, Patrick Glémaud, presented four specific client proposals for funding to Andrew House on behalf of Sustainable Ventures Inc., and while he is at it, could he also explain why none of this was registered with the lobbying commissioner?

Hon. Gary Goodyear (Minister of State (Science and Technology) (Federal Economic Development Agency for Southern Ontario), CPC): Mr. Speaker, first of all, the member is absolutely incorrect. It was three projects. None of those projects received any funding.

Oral Questions

This government does not give funding to projects that do not qualify. That is exactly what the Liberals used to do. But if the lobbyist who is required to register the meeting did not register the meeting, I suggest the member report it to the lobbying commissioner as we have done.

* * *

[Translation]

FINANCIAL INSTITUTIONS

Mr. Daniel Paillé (Hochelaga, BQ): Mr. Speaker, further to the Bloc's proposals, labour and environmental groups are now calling for a tax on international financial transactions. Similarly, a consensus is emerging among G20 nations to tax the gargantuan profits of banks so as to be able to respond to possible crises.

When will the Minister of Finance, who is going it alone, stop protecting his banking buddies?

[English]

Hon. Jim Flaherty (Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the world has just been through the most serious credit crisis in at least a generation. Fortunately, in this country, we have a very sound banking system. In fact, the World Economic Forum ranks our banking system as the strongest in the world.

No Canadian taxpayers' money had to be put into our banking system. This is not true in the United States, Great Britain, Germany, France and other places. Some of these other countries are looking at taxing their banks. We are looking at alternative forms of accomplishing the same goal. We will continue to work with our international partners.

• (1435)

[Translation]

Mr. Daniel Paillé (Hochelaga, BQ): Mr. Speaker, it is strange to hear that from someone who wanted to deregulate this industry in 2000.

According to Responsible Investment Group Inc., some of Canada's financial institutions, the minister's cronies, are on the wall of shame. They are reportedly helping to fund companies involved in producing submunition bombs, land mines and unspeakable weapons affecting civilian populations.

Why did the Minister of Finance not show leadership at the G20 summit by recommending to his colleagues that the worst practices of his buddies, the banks, be regulated?

[English]

Hon. Jim Flaherty (Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, that is an interesting question. I would welcome more information from the member about the relationship between Canadian financial institutions and some of the negative things that he just mentioned. If he has some information about that, I would be pleased to review it afterwards.

However, let me say this about our financial institutions and our regulatory system in Canada. They have proven to be the best. They have survived. We are an example to the rest of the world, a model to the rest of the world, and Canadians should be proud of our financial system and the way it is regulated in Canada.

[Translation]

AFGHANISTAN

Mr. Claude Bachand (Saint-Jean, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the government continues to block the release of incriminating documents on the Afghan detainee issue. On Tuesday, the Department of Justice intervened before the Military Police Complaints Commission to block, once again, the distribution of new documents. The government claims that the commission does not have the mandate to study these documents.

Does this new cover-up by the government, which, by the way, is itself under investigation, not prove the need for a real, independent and public commission of inquiry?

[English]

Hon. Rob Nicholson (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the mandate of the MPCC and indeed the Canada Evidence Act, under which it operates, have all been in place for many years. I have not heard any complaints from the hon. member, indeed any member of the opposition. Officials are having a look at this. I suggest that the hon. member let the commission do its work.

[Translation]

Mr. Claude Bachand (Saint-Jean, BQ): Mr. Speaker, while General Natynczyk rejects the accusations of the Afghan Canadian interpreter about the death of an Afghan teenager and the capture of innocent people in 2007, the interpreter asks the Prime Minister to stop being "soft on war crimes". Like the interpreter, I ask the minister to immediately make public the internal report on these events.

What is the government waiting for to shed light on all these accusations?

[English]

Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, General Natynczyk, the Chief of the Defence Staff and the highest-ranking officer in the Canadian Forces, was very clear in a letter that he released this week. Again, I would invite the hon. member to actually take the time to read it.

It speaks of a Canadian Forces raid on a bomb-making compound that was used to make IEDs and rockets that were aimed specifically at killing innocent people, including Canadian Forces members serving in that country. He went on to talk about an insurgent who was shot in a battlefield incident, an armed insurgent who was posing a threat to Canadian soldiers who were there.

There were insurgents at that time taken into custody, all of whom tested positive for explosives and firearms residue. That is the type of work that our soldiers are doing.

Hon. Ujjal Dosanjh (Vancouver South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, yesterday the Minister of Justice told the House that the government would continue to provide all necessary documents to the Military Police Complaints Commission. Today, the government would not even give a date for the disclosure of the documents to the commission. Instead, the government told the commission it will be done when it is good and ready.

Oral Questions

The MPCC chair called that close to being offensive to the commission and to the public. Yes, it is contemptible. It is absolutely in contempt of the House. The government should be accountable to the House. Why would the government not call a public inquiry and end the charade?

• (1440)

Hon. Rob Nicholson (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am surprised that the hon. member would have a problem with the mandate of the MPCC. It was put in place by his government. The rules under which it operates were put in by the previous government. All of this was conducted and put in place by this hon. member and his colleagues. I do not know what his problem is. Let officials do the work that they are commissioned to do. Let the commission do its work. He should support that.

Hon. Ujjal Dosanjh (Vancouver South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is not about the mandate of the commission, it is about the arrogance of the government. Let me read some quotations. There are “allegations of beatings, electrocution...and whipping with rubber cables”, “torture...is endemic”, the government is “accused of complicity in the torture of Taliban suspects”, and “government’s denials of such abuse were the result of a ‘head in the sand’ attitude”. These came from the British press this morning about a British court case.

These allegations are exactly identical to the allegations that are being made by Colvin and others in this country. It is a damning indictment of Canada on the world stage. When is the government going to call a public inquiry and clear Canada’s name internationally?

Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, let me read a few quotations. This is from David Mulrone, a senior public servant in charge of the Afghan mission. He said:

We never, ever transferred anyone if we thought there was a substantial risk of torture. We knew there were problems in the Afghan system, but we developed a robust monitoring system.

That is the failed system that we inherited from the previous government.

Lieutenant-General Michel Gauthier, the former commander of the expeditionary force in Afghanistan, said:

It’s why none of us would knowingly have ignored, disregarded, suppressed, covered up, or put a cloak of secrecy over anything that we received from the field, especially on something as important as the detainee issue. I say that as dispassionately as I can. I mean it absolutely sincerely.

What he was concerned about was being labelled a war criminal by the member opposite.

* * *

HEALTH

Hon. Anita Neville (Winnipeg South Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, scientists, Winnipeggers and the HIV community want answers. The Canadian HIV vaccine initiative was jointly announced in 2007 with the Gates Foundation. The International Centre for Infectious Diseases in Winnipeg was a prime contender for the work.

It is reported that the Minister of Public Safety tried to plant the provincial Conservative campaign manager in Manitoba as the chair

of ICID, but the scheme failed. Is that why the Conservatives just cancelled the HIV initiative altogether?

Hon. Leona Aglukkaq (Minister of Health, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as I said before, the money is still on the table. An independent study had been conducted, commissioned by the Gates Foundation, and concluded that the facility was unnecessary.

Hon. Anita Neville (Winnipeg South Centre, Lib.): There were different words at committee yesterday, Mr. Speaker.

The Minister of Public Safety issued a statement about science in February, “Science is about neutral fact-finding, and in this case, the critical health and safety of Canadians”.

Could the Minister of Health therefore explain why a minister contacted a board member of the ICID, suggesting that the Winnipeg application for the Canadian HIV vaccine initiative was indeed in jeopardy?

Hon. Leona Aglukkaq (Minister of Health, CPC): Mr. Speaker, during the committee appearance it was made very clear by the officials as to the process that was followed in examining the proposals that had been received. An independent study had been commissioned and it was determined that a facility was unnecessary.

We remain committed to working with the Gates Foundation. We will report back on what some of those initiatives will be.

* * *

FIREARMS REGISTRY

Mrs. Kelly Block (Saskatoon—Rosetown—Biggar, CPC): Mr. Speaker, yesterday the Liberal leader said he would whip his caucus to vote to keep the Liberal long gun registry. Canadians know that there are only two options—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order, please. The hon. member for Saskatoon—Rosetown—Biggar has the floor and she is trying to ask a question. We have to be able to hear.

Mrs. Kelly Block: Mr. Speaker, Canadians know there are only two options: we vote to keep the Liberal boondoggle, or we vote to scrap it.

Eight Liberal MPs voted to scrap the ineffective Liberal gun registry during the bill’s first reading.

Would the Minister of Public Safety remind those members why they should represent their constituents and vote to scrap the Liberal long gun registry?

• (1445)

Hon. Vic Toews (Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Liberal leader has again chosen to turn his back on rural Canadians by clearly stating he still supports a wasteful and ineffective long gun registry.

Our government believes that gun control should target criminals, not law-abiding citizens. It should promote safe streets, not penalize the lawful activities of hunters and rural Canadians.

Oral Questions

The Liberal leader is bending over backward to secure guilty pleas from law-abiding farmers and duck hunters.

The choice is clear for all MPs, especially those who voted for the bill at second reading. We either vote to scrap the bill, or we keep it.

* * *

INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY

Mr. David Christopherson (Hamilton Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Auditor General reported today that many of the federal government's information technology systems are on the verge of imminent failure.

From OAS and GIS monthly cheques to immigration and refugee applications, the breakdown of our computer systems would be devastating for the millions of Canadians who depend on them.

Will the government do the right thing and announce today the necessary funding to develop IT strategies and protect Canadians from critical IT failure?

Hon. Stockwell Day (President of the Treasury Board and Minister for the Asia-Pacific Gateway, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we appreciate the work of the Office of the Auditor General. We have looked at these reports and have met with the Auditor General.

She has observed that a number of departments have made advances on their information technology plans and others have not. We have given instructions that we want all departments to bring forward their plans for dealing with information technology and to do it within a certain time limit. From there we will be able to take an overall view of what needs to be done and how much it will cost.

* * *

PUBLIC SAFETY

Mr. Don Davies (Vancouver Kingsway, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Canadian Police Association today said that the federal government is not providing sufficient money to local police forces across Canada. It is telling us that the 2,500 police officers New Democrats called for, and the government promised, are not being fully created or properly funded.

The five-year, \$400 million police recruitment fund is now up for renewal and the CPA says it needs to be improved, not abandoned.

Will the minister commit to sustainable funding to help local police forces add the officers they need to keep our communities safe?

Hon. Vic Toews (Minister of Public Safety, CPC): That was an interesting question, Mr. Speaker, coming from an individual and his party who have voted consistently against support for the police.

Our Conservative government is committed to working with provincial and municipal governments that are responsible for policing and have asked for legislative initiatives to keep our streets safe.

We have instituted the police officers recruitment fund, which delivered over \$400 million to the provinces to hire new police officers. We have taken steps to make sure there are individuals who are trained to ensure municipal and provincial policing is in place.

[Translation]

ARTS AND CULTURE

Mrs. Carole Lavallée (Saint-Bruno—Saint-Hubert, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Canadian Heritage has it all wrong when he says that only the Union des artistes agrees with levies on MP3 players. I quickly came up with a list of a dozen other organizations that also agree with it: ACTRA, SOCAN, SODRAC, the Société professionnelle des auteurs et des compositeurs du Québec, the Guilde des musiciens, ADISQ, the CPCC, Artisti and even the Union des consommateurs.

What will it take for the minister to listen to reason and give artists their fair pay?

Hon. Tony Clement (Minister of Industry, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our government cut taxes.

[English]

We are the government that cut taxes. We are not looking for ways to put new taxes on hard-working Canadians and consumers. We have made a commitment to copyright legislation. It will be fair and balanced and made in Canada.

[Translation]

Mrs. Carole Lavallée (Saint-Bruno—Saint-Hubert, BQ): Mr. Speaker, there is a consensus in Quebec about fair pay for artists. The Union des consommateurs and the main organizations that defend artists' rights are calling for levies on digital players and eventually on new technology. A simple amendment to the Copyright Act would quickly clear up the issue.

How can the Minister of Canadian Heritage and Official Languages claim to know the needs of artists and consumers better than they themselves?

Hon. Tony Clement (Minister of Industry, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the solution does not lie in harming consumers' interests.

● (1450)

[English]

We are not focused on making it more difficult for consumers to buy products like BlackBerrys or iPods or other MP3 devices. We want to have a fair and balanced piece of legislation that protects the creators, protects the consumers and makes sure we have a made in Canada solution for copyright reform.

* * *

FISHERIES

Hon. Gerry Byrne (Humber—St. Barbe—Baie Verte, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, a 63% cut in the southern Gulf of St. Lawrence snow crab quotas has left an entire region in crisis. A 63% decline in just one season is too much to explain.

Oral Questions

Either the science branch of the Department of Fisheries and Oceans failed to properly monitor the health of these stocks over the last several years and failed to provide the minister with timely advice, or the minister herself failed to properly act on the science advice that was given to her over several years.

I would like to ask the minister which it is: Did science fail or did the minister?

Hon. Gail Shea (Minister of Fisheries and Oceans, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I certainly sympathize with those who are impacted by the reduction in snow crab quotas. This was a very difficult decision to make, but conservation must remain our top priority.

Surely the hon. member is not suggesting we allow overfishing.

Hon. Gerry Byrne (Humber—St. Barbe—Baie Verte, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, allow me to quote directly from the documents produced by the minister's own Science Advisory Secretariat on Gulf crab. In 2007, it said that a "population is now in a phase of decline" in Gulf crab. In 2008, it said that recruitment to the fishery was declining by 39%. In 2009, it said that recruitment to the fishery was declining by a further 13%.

Either the science branch of the Department of Fisheries and Oceans failed or the minister did.

She has now been exposed as failing the fishery and failing conservation.

Hon. Gail Shea (Minister of Fisheries and Oceans, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as the hon. member knows, crab has a four-year cycle. Normally, it would go down in intervening years and peak in the fourth year.

As I said before, conservation is our number one priority in the Department of Fisheries and Oceans. That is why the quota is what it is, to protect the future of this fishery.

* * *

NORTHERN DEVELOPMENT

Mr. Dennis Bevington (Western Arctic, NDP): Mr. Speaker, today the Auditor General revealed that the main problem with the environmental regulatory regime in the Northwest Territories is the government's own failure to properly implement it.

The Auditor General detailed how the government has starved identified funding needs, not acted on past recommendations and dragged its feet when it comes to implementation.

However, the current government says the system's problems are all the fault of the process created by northerners to protect their lands and waters.

Will the minister admit that the highly publicized objective of regulatory reform is designed to open the north to uncontrolled exploitation and that it, not northerners, has created the problem?

Hon. Chuck Strahl (Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development, Federal Interlocutor for Métis and Non-Status Indians and Minister of the Canadian Northern Economic Development Agency, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I encourage the hon. member to get home and talk to some of the industry folks in his own territory, because they are telling me that, if we do not get the

regulatory regime fixed by the time the diamond mines are closed, there will not be any more employment

Mind, he is an NDPer and he does not really care about that, but we do. That is why we created the Canadian Northern Economic Development Agency. That is why we have invested in initiatives on community-based environmental monitoring. We have gone ahead and are going to create the first Canadian high Arctic research station.

We continue to invest in the north. That is what northerners deserve and that is what this government expects.

* * *

AGRICULTURE AND AGRI-FOOD

Mr. Alex Atamanenko (British Columbia Southern Interior, NDP): Mr. Speaker, instead of firing off cheap shots, the minister might want to get out and actually do some work to help people in the north.

Farmers and consumers agree that public scientific research is required to solve problems of debilitating crop diseases, like wheat rust and soya bean root rot. The Auditor General blamed the government's funding cuts of 20% and 6% over the past three years for reducing the amount of peer-reviewed research that helps producers. Cuts to peer-reviewed research mean harm to farmers' incomes and threats to food security across Canada.

Will the minister commit today to reversing cuts to agricultural research funding?

Mr. Pierre Lemieux (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Agriculture, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we accept the Auditor General's recommendations, and we are already implementing many of them.

Our government continues to invest in research, including \$158 million for the agri-innovations program, turning new ideas in technologies into viable market opportunities, and \$26 million to modernize federal laboratories.

We are investing directly in industry, including \$28 million for canola, flax and pulse crops, \$6 million for beef producers and \$10 million for dairy.

* * *

● (1455)

JUSTICE

Ms. Dona Cadman (Surrey North, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our government has already done a great deal for victims of crime in this country.

We created the federal ombudsman for victims of crime as well as provided the funding necessary for programs and services for victims across the country. However, we need to do more.

Could the Minister of Justice please inform the House of the legislative step he took today to put the rights of victims ahead of the rights of criminals?

Oral Questions

Hon. Rob Nicholson (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am proud to say that within the last hour, we introduced a bill in the Senate that, once and for all, would get rid of the faint hope clause from the Criminal Code. This is good news for victims and good news for everyone who believes murderers must serve serious time for serious crime.

I call on all members of the House to support this important legislation. After all, a minority Parliament is no excuse not to stand up for victims and law-abiding Canadians.

* * *

PUBLIC SAFETY

Ms. Siobhan Coady (St. John's South—Mount Pearl, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Auditor General's report shows that the RCMP believes the Conservative government's negligence "increases the risk to police and public safety that could lead to injury or death".

Why has the Conservative government placed front-line officers and Canadian families at unnecessary risk?

Hon. Vic Toews (Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our government has done more for ensuring that there are officers on the street, as opposed to making cuts as the prior Liberal government did when it in fact shut down Depot, so that there were no officers being trained.

We are in fact concerned about the RCMP. Our funding to provide cadets and technical support for the RCMP is unsurpassed, certainly unsurpassed by the prior government.

* * *

[Translation]

STATUS OF WOMEN

Ms. Nicole Demers (Laval, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the former minister for Status of Women promised the Conseil d'intervention pour l'accès des femmes au travail, a group working to increase women's access to jobs, that it would receive funding from Status of Women Canada's community fund. However, the group was denied funding.

When the Prime Minister distanced himself from his minister, did he do the same with the promises she made?

[English]

Hon. Rona Ambrose (Minister of Public Works and Government Services and Minister for Status of Women, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I know this organization does good work in the area of pay equity.

Let me just say how proud I am of the work this government has done to ensure we have successful women in the public service. In fact, we are proud to have elevated intelligent and competent women in the public service.

When it comes to pay equity, more than half of the public service is now made up of women and 43% of the deputy ministers who lead the public service are women.

We will continue to support women, and we will continue to push the envelope to make sure women reach their full potential in public life.

AUTOMOTIVE INDUSTRY

Mr. Brian Masse (Windsor West, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the government is still failing to stand up for Canadians.

The U.S. transportation secretary just levied the largest fine against Toyota for knowing about brake problems months in advance. It was \$16 million for "putting consumers at risk" and failing to come clean about a pedal defect it has known about for months.

Here in Canada, we have learned that Toyota executives have secretly known about acceleration problems for at least five years.

When will the minister take action and stop the second-class treatment of Canadians?

Hon. John Baird (Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, CPC): Mr. Speaker, let me very clear. The Government of Canada will work to ensure that all legal measures and the full force of Canadian law are used and that all measures are taken to ensure that Canadians are safe. The issue that the member discusses is under investigation by my department.

Let me tell the member opposite about a key difference between Canada and the United States. In Canada ministers of the Crown do not order criminal charges to be laid.

* * *

TAXATION

Mr. Bruce Stanton (Simcoe North, CPC): Mr. Speaker, while our Conservative government is working to create jobs for Canadians, the opposition is finding ways to hike taxes and do more reckless spending. For example, the Bloc, supported by the Liberals and NDP, are pushing Bill C-288 that, according to the PBO, would cost over \$.5 billion a year. The bill is set for third and final reading and cannot be amended.

Could the Minister of Finance please inform the House of some of the other problems with this bill?

● (1500)

Hon. Jim Flaherty (Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, let us be clear. Bill C-288 would grant a temporary special tax subsidy for new graduates taking employment in so-called depressed regions. How are they defined in the bill? They are so poorly defined in the bill that Fort McMurray would qualify as a depressed region according to Bill C-288.

I know the Bloc leader has personal investments that he is fond of in the oil sands, but this is going too far, subsidizing Fort McMurray through a private member's bill.

*Routine Proceedings***INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY**

Ms. Siobhan Coady (St. John's South—Mount Pearl, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Auditor General today has reported that the government's aging information technology is a significant risk that the government has failed to address. It has ignored this problem and there is now a \$2 billion shortfall in three departments alone that could mean EI benefits, income tax rebates and refunds and pension benefits are all at risk.

Why does the government fail to treat this as a priority?

Hon. Stockwell Day (President of the Treasury Board and Minister for the Asia-Pacific Gateway, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as I have already said, this is an important issue. We appreciate the observations by the Auditor General. I have in fact met with her and Treasury Board officials have met with her officials.

We have given instruction to all departments, even though some are already advanced in this work as the Auditor General noted, that we want them to complete their plans on aging information technology. When they do that and bring them forward with the timeline we have given them, we will then look at the overall amount that is needed and the types of technologies needed so we can keep our systems working well.

* * *

[Translation]

BROADBAND CANADA PROGRAM

Mr. Serge Cardin (Sherbrooke, BQ): Mr. Speaker, on April 4, the Minister of Industry announced upcoming consultations on the digital economy. The minister said that technological take-up is directly linked to productivity. However, many Quebec regions still do not have access to high-speed Internet. The Conservatives are so out of touch with the task at hand that they received applications for funding amounting to four times what is in the three-year envelope.

Why did the government not increase Broadband Canada's funding in its latest budget?

Hon. Tony Clement (Minister of Industry, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we announced a broadband subsidy fund in excess of \$200 million. Announcements will be made as soon as possible.

[English]

We are reviewing the applications and will have announcements as soon as possible.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

[English]

NATIONAL VOLUNTEER WEEK

The Speaker: It being 3:02 p.m., pursuant to order made earlier today the House will now proceed to statements by ministers.

I call upon the hon. Minister of State for Seniors.

Hon. Diane Ablonczy (Minister of State (Seniors), CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to rise today in honour of National Volunteer Week. Others have mentioned this today. Simply put, volunteers are a big part of what makes Canada such a great place to

live. From coast to coast to coast, more than 12 million volunteers are taking the time to contribute to their communities. They may be found coaching hockey, feeding the vulnerable, working at the local region and in thousands more roles that support, help and care for others.

National Volunteer Week is set aside every year to honour these men, women and young people. They contribute time, talent and, just as important, kindness of heart to those around them and make the quality of life better for everyone.

How much total time do all these generous people give every year? Thousands of hours, maybe even millions of hours of precious time? The real number is even more astounding. Canadians give over two billion hours each and every year to empower a wide variety of causes and activities, over two billion hours. The value of this work to the Canadian economy is estimated to be greater than \$14 billion annually. Those are some pretty incredible numbers and they add up to the kind of society that is the envy of the world.

Our government fully recognizes the invaluable contributions volunteers make to Canada's success. That is why, in the 2010 throne speech, we committed to a new Prime Minister's award for volunteerism. This new award will honour the great work and personal sacrifices made by some outstanding individuals working as volunteers.

The throne speech also laid out our commitment to work with innovative charities to tackle social challenges. Our government recognizes that volunteers and the organizations they serve are on the front lines every day. That means they are often better placed to deliver results on a wide variety of issues facing our communities.

Of course, our government's commitment to volunteerism did not start with the 2010 throne speech, nor does it end there. In budget 2010, our government committed \$10 million in additional funding to the new horizons for seniors program. This program supports projects that focus on volunteering by seniors. It contributes to initiatives that give seniors an opportunity to also mentor the next generation of volunteers and pass on their valuable skills and knowledge. Do members know that seniors volunteer more hours on average than any other age group in Canada?

The 2010 budget, which we hope the House will support, would also eliminate the disbursement quota for Canadian charities. This budget measure would provide important flexibility for Canada's not-for-profit and voluntary sector. It would deliver a change that has been very well received by our valuable charities.

National Volunteer Week gives us seven days to say thanks to Canada's volunteers, to thank them for coaching the hockey team, to thank them for working at the information desk at the hospital, to thank them for running the fundraising campaign, to thank them for planting those trees.

On behalf of the government and all Canadians, let us say "Thank you" to Canada's 12.5 million volunteers.

Routine Proceedings

•(1505)

Mr. Michael Savage (Dartmouth—Cole Harbour, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am proud to recognize National Volunteer Week in Canada and honour the millions of Canadians who make Canada better by giving back to their communities.

Two weeks ago I visited Holy Trinity Emmanuel Parish in Dartmouth, which holds a clothing depot every Wednesday. It is run by a remarkable woman, Doris Makarder who, along with Dot, Marilyn, Connie, Eddie and others, gather used clothing, display it and give it to those in need for free and with a smile. It is a wonderful operation and very time consuming, but Doris and her colleagues do it without complaint, thankful for the opportunity to serve.

She is but one face of volunteerism, one of over 12 million volunteers in Canada. Food banks, seniors centres, child care organizations, cultural groups, kids recreation, support for the disabled, the list is endless of those organization that simply would not exist without volunteers.

As a father to children who play organized hockey, soccer, tennis, paddling and are involved in Guides, I am indebted to the coaches, the managers and the organizers. If we think kids sports are expensive now, we should try doing it without volunteers.

Most members of the House have volunteered, but all members of the House have benefited from volunteers. Those who work on our campaigns, and our opponents campaigns, honour us and the democratic process.

Thanks to GPI Atlantic, we do have an economic measurement of the value of volunteers. In its 2008 Nova Scotia Genuine Progress Index, it tells us that volunteers in Canada contributed the equivalent of \$64.9 billion to Canada. Volunteers contributed \$1.8 billion worth of volunteer hours in Nova Scotia alone. The budget for the province of Nova Scotia is \$8.4 billion.

These are staggering numbers, but there is a warning. That number I mentioned is \$370 million less than it was in 1998, as volunteers struggled to find the time and the mechanisms to volunteer.

A sector worth \$65 billion is worth investing in. We need to recognize exceptional volunteers. Governments also need to partner with the voluntary sector to encourage volunteerism.

The spirit of volunteerism is alive, but today's demands are great and we must do everything possible to encourage and support volunteers. They are irreplaceable. They are the heroes of our nation.

This week we say thanks to the 12 million Canadians who make communities better, who offer their time to others and keep Canada better than ever. Thanks very much to the volunteers in Canada.

•(1510)

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Josée Beaudin (Saint-Lambert, BQ): Mr. Speaker, as we mark National Volunteer Week, I would like, on behalf of the Bloc Québécois, to extend my congratulations and, especially, to express my deep appreciation to the millions of volunteers in Quebec and in Canada who selflessly give their time whether to care for a relative

or a sick person, support a cause they feel strongly about or help to improve the well-being of their community. Their work is essential, nothing less.

However, unlike paid work, the value of volunteer work is not quantifiable and is invaluable. Since it contributes not only to economic development, but also to the common good, we should consider volunteer workers to be partners.

By giving their time in such a way, volunteer workers show a greatness of spirit that we must highlight, not only a week per year, but all year long.

Their commitment is as noble as it is indispensable, whether it is to directly help needy fellow citizens, the elderly, the sick or, as well, politicians like ourselves. Unfortunately, this commitment is too often forgotten and neglected. It remains, so to speak, in the shadows.

We must salute the passion that they show to defend the causes dear to their hearts. As it is often the case these days, despite a very busy schedule, they find a way to make a commitment to their community.

Back home, at least 2 million people give some of their time to help out in Quebec. Let us have more than a simple thought for them. The next time we see a volunteer hard at work, let us take the time to give praise and encouragement.

And we should not be on the lookout only for older volunteers, because contrary to what we might think, nearly half the youth between 15 and 24 do some type of volunteer work.

So, it is more than appropriate that this year's theme for the Quebec Volunteer Week is "Volunteer for Life". Obviously, today's youth seem on the right path to volunteer for life, and we must be glad and congratulate them.

[*English*]

Mr. Tony Martin (Sault Ste. Marie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am honoured today to represent my caucus and join all members as we recognize National Volunteer Week and give a huge thanks to volunteers.

These men, women, students and children serve on boards, coach sports, staff the front lines in social services, do disaster relief and international aid. They are active in health care, social justice, the arts, environment, political movements and more. They give their time, energy, creativity and skills.

Under the radar so often, these selfless individuals with their generous compassion just make things better for our communities and our people.

I am struck by the number of times hon. members stand in the House to commend a citizen or a community event that so often really is the recognition of volunteers.

Volunteerism is a central thread in the social fabric of Canadian life. However, we cannot be complacent about this. Reports indicate that there are fewer volunteers in Canada and they end up giving even more of their time.

I would be remiss in our recognition today without noting the government cuts to volunteer organizations, to literacy, to arts and more. These cuts hurt the vulnerable and create dangerous social deficits.

As a country, as a government, we need to act ourselves on this year's theme, "From Compassion to Action". We cannot take our volunteers for granted nor starve the sector that resources them.

There was an extraordinary voluntary sector initiative earlier this decade with solid recommendations to implement on how to grow the capacity of the volunteer sector, to give it the resources to help volunteers do what they do so well. Our volunteer organizations need a reliable federal funding envelope to drive this progress.

Let us express our gratitude to the legion of volunteers and let us support our volunteers by giving the volunteer sector the tools and resources it needs to ensure that volunteerism continues to play a strong and vital role in Canadian society.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

• (1515)

[*Translation*]

BUSINESS OF SUPPLY

OPPOSITION MOTION—REPRESENTATION OF QUEBEC IN THE HOUSE OF COMMONS

The House resumed consideration of the motion, and of the amendment.

The Speaker: Before Question Period, the hon. member for Brossard—La Prairie had the floor. She now has six minutes remaining in which to speak.

The hon. member for Brossard—La Prairie has the floor.

Mrs. Alexandra Mendes (Brossard—La Prairie, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I will not take all six minutes, but I will try to pick up from where I left off earlier.

I want to come back to the question of what a fair representation from Quebec will be once we have dealt with the government's bill.

At the moment, the Bloc is proposing an increase of approximately nine seats for Quebec. This is not necessarily the fairest proportion in terms of the population, but neither is the government's proposal, because it limits Quebec to 75 seats, whereas, in a reorganized House, Quebec would, in principle, have the right to two or perhaps three more seats.

I would like to repeat that, under the Charlottetown accord in August 1992, Quebec had a guarantee of 25% of the seats in the House of Commons in perpetuity. Through the entire campaign leading up to the referendum, the Bloc's position was that people should vote against the Charlottetown accord, even though it provided major guarantees for Quebec's representation in the House.

Business of Supply

Many people in Quebec were greatly discouraged by those who would eventually become Bloc members of Parliament.

I do not understand why they would come back to 24.35% today when they turned down a guarantee of 25%. I should also make it clear that, ultimately, it is Quebec's right to fight. But the very reason for that party's existence is to do away with all of Quebec's representation in the House.

Let us move to the government's bill that will lead to discussions in committee. At that point, we will be able to try to find a fair representation for Quebec in the House so that its presence can be maintained with everything that sets us apart as a province and with everything that we can contribute to our fellow Canadians. I think that that is the most logical and the most democratic way to proceed. This bill must be debated in committee. I will stop there. I think all the arguments have been made.

Mrs. Claude DeBellefeuille (Beauharnois—Salaberry, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I listened to the speech by the member for Brossard—La Prairie and I found some weaknesses in her argument concerning our opposition motion. Maybe she is not aware that the National Assembly of Quebec, which is made up of three parties, namely the Liberal Party of Quebec—which, to this day, is a federalist party and which, as a matter of fact, forms the government—the Parti Québécois and the Action démocratique du Québec, passed a unanimous motion, the same one that we are bringing forward today, asking that the political weight of the Quebec nation be respected in the House of Commons.

Can she explain to me why, as a member representing Quebecers, she seems to be opposed to this motion that was passed unanimously by the supreme democratic body of the Quebec nation?

Mrs. Alexandra Mendes: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for her question.

First I will say that, with Québec solidaire, there are four parties in the National Assembly.

My answer will be simply this: if our colleagues are always asking the government and federal entities not to interfere in areas under provincial jurisdiction, I think they should also see that, while the motion by the National Assembly of Quebec is perfectly acceptable—and I was aware that the National Assembly had voted unanimously in favour of maintaining Quebec's political weight in the House of Commons—it is the responsibility of the House of Commons to debate the issue and to have discussions with the other provinces as to how to ensure that Quebec's representation in the House of Commons is fair and politically beneficial to that province.

• (1520)

Mrs. Claude DeBellefeuille (Beauharnois—Salaberry, BQ): Mr. Speaker, it is my pleasure to rise this afternoon on the Bloc's opposition day dealing with a subject that is close to my heart. I want to take the time to read the motion before us. I would also like to say that I will be splitting my time with the kind, competent, fabulous member from Trois-Rivières.

Business of Supply

The motion before us today asks the government to stop trying to pass any bill that would have the effect of reducing Quebec's current political weight in the House of Commons, which is 24.35% of all seats. I listened intently today to some of the speeches of my colleagues, members of both the Bloc Québécois and other parties. Some of them explored the more legal aspect, referring to the Constitution. Personally, I am going to try in the minutes remaining to me to understand what the real intent is of the Conservative government, which has tabled bills more than once since being elected with the purpose, in my view, of reducing Quebec's political weight in the House of Commons.

There is good reason to ask this question and I can think of several possible reasons. Why has the government tried repeatedly since being elected to table bills that weaken Quebec? One possibility is that it is an underhanded way to get a majority in the next election. In the last six federal elections, Quebecers have elected a vast majority of Bloc members to represent them in the House of Commons. Despite all the high hopes of the Conservatives in the last election, a vast majority of Quebecers again placed their confidence in Bloc members to represent their interests. Looking at the surveys done by various firms and published in newspapers, I see that the last six or eight confirm this strong tendency of Quebecers, who say that the Bloc Québécois is a good party to represent and defend their interests.

I make no accusations but would still like to ask the following: would this be an underhanded way to get a majority without Quebec by adding so many seats in Ontario, for example? Is it to please English Canadians who really wonder about the Bloc presence in the House of Commons? Is it to comfort English Canadians who are closer to Reformers, the Conservatives, the right wing? Is it to please them by saying the Conservatives can put Quebec in its place and are going to make sure now that the constitution of Parliament and the House of Commons reduces the political weight of Quebec? Is this not a way of telling Quebec to accept its role and be a province like all the others?

These are legitimate questions and I am asking them. It may be odd to say this, but I am a member who is known for doing a lot of work in my riding. Sometimes we think that what we discuss here is of little or not much interest to our fellow citizens, who are fairly cynical about politics and politicians. But I would say that this bill has struck a chord, that is, it has generated interest among electors. They talk to me and they understand very clearly that it is unfair. It depends of course on what side you are. Federalists find this quite normal, for they see Canada as a single entity and are not interested in specificities, such as those of Quebec, which is a nation.

I should mention that a motion was passed in this House which recognized the Quebec nation. What we have realized since the motion was passed is that it was theoretical, that it will never be acted on. I will give some examples.

• (1525)

If it truly wanted to take account of the Quebec nation and its distinct character, the federal government would agree to treat Quebec fairly by ensuring that all federally regulated companies are subject to Bill 101. The national language in Quebec is French. Why

does this government refuse to recognize that fact and allow federally regulated companies to be subject to Bill 101?

The government also promotes multiculturalism. That means that it encourages immigrants to preserve their culture of origin so far as possible. In Quebec, on the other hand, we have a different perspective on the integration of immigrants: they become partners and full citizens of the province.

The government also refuses to let us fully control our communications and telecommunications, which are the engine and soul of a nation, of a people. We need to hold the key, to have full authority over our communications and telecommunications. The Bloc Québécois therefore introduced a bill, since we are quite proactive when it comes to defending the interests of Quebec. This bill was designed to create a radio-television and telecommunications commission, a CRTQ, which would have regulated on the basis of the interests and challenges of Quebec.

And of course, there is that old promise that the government made when it began its mandate—namely to limit the federal spending power. Since its election, the government has not only failed to keep its promise, but it has increased its encroachments into fields of provincial jurisdiction.

As I have said, recognition of the nation is meaningless for the federal government, and for many Liberals perhaps, it is nothing but wind. Nothing concrete is being done to recognize the nation.

As I was saying to the hon. member for Brossard—La Prairie, the National Assembly of Quebec has passed a unanimous motion. There are four parties in the National Assembly of Quebec. Some are federalist, others are sovereignist. All of these parties agreed to tell the federal government to withdraw this bill, which would weaken or reduce the political weight of Quebec. The Bloc is being accused of pushing for a substantial political weight in the House of Commons and told that it wants to leave this House and form a country. And they are right, for my dearest wish is to prepare the way for the sovereignty of Quebec and repatriate all the powers that we can so that we are able to build our country properly. In the meantime, however, we must ensure that Quebecers are well represented on the basis of their weight and their distinctiveness, for they form a nation.

The motion unanimously passed by the Quebec National Assembly is very clear. It is the same as the motion we are debating today. It is important for those listening to us to understand that this is the unanimous request of all elected representatives of the Quebec nation's highest democratic institution.

Business of Supply

I find it somewhat funny to hear what the Conservatives have to say in favour of this bill. If I understood them correctly, they care so much about democracy that they want justice to be served through proportional representation in the House of Commons. When it suits them, they use democracy as an argument even though Conservatives are poor role models when it comes to respecting democratic institutions. It is rather difficult to talk about respect for democracy when a Prime Minister prorogues Parliament because he does not want to face the opposition. They can hardly be considered as role models when they hide documents relating to the transfer of Afghan prisoners. There are many examples that lead us to say that this government is not a model of respect for democratic institutions. It is ironic to give us this example in order to justify the bill.

• (1530)

As usual, the reasons mentioned in our French-language media come from the Quebec Conservative MPs, who did not seem to be excessively bothered by a decrease in Quebec's political weight in the Canadian Parliament. This is hardly surprising since they only care about Canada's interests, while we are interested in Quebec's interests.

Since my time has expired, I will conclude by saying that this bill must absolutely be abandoned. I am calling on opposition MPs to vote against this legislation that would decrease the political weight of Quebec, which is one of Canada's founding nations.

Hon. Joseph Volpe (Eglinton—Lawrence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have some questions for the hon. member for Beauharnois—Salaberry.

There is something ironic about her presentation and the Conservatives' bill. I agree that the Conservatives did not consider all the implications of this bill. I find the position of the hon. member a bit surprising, and I would like to hear her comments on the following.

If they are concerned only with the interests of a province outside Canada, who will take care of the interests of Canadians living in that province within Canada? I agree that the future of all Canadians does not matter to the Conservatives. To my mind, everyone in Canada is a Canadian. As for the hon. member and her caucus, who seek the sovereignty or separation of Canadians living in Quebec, why does it matter if the Conservatives introduce a policy that does not, in a sense, reflect the interests of Canada?

Forgive me if my French does not lead the hon. member...

The Speaker: I have to interrupt the hon. member to give the hon. member for Beauharnois—Salaberry enough time to respond.

Mrs. Claude DeBellefeuille: Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the hon. member for his question, and I appreciate his attempt to ask me a question in my mother tongue.

I am not sure that I understood his question. But I can tell him that since the Bloc Québécois's creation, it is no accident that we are here. The members of the Bloc are elected by Quebecers. In a democracy, the voters have the final say. If, election after election, Bloc Québécois members continue to be elected, it must be that Quebecers feel the Bloc does a better job of representing and defending their interests.

As a nation, Quebec has different needs, and it wants to articulate those needs clearly. By electing a majority of Bloc Québécois members to the House of Commons, Quebec is making it very clear exactly how much importance the House needs to give the Quebec nation.

Obviously, if I had the choice, I would prefer to be sitting in the Parliament of the country of Quebec, but that will come one day. I am quite confident that day is not so far off.

• (1535)

Ms. Paule Brunelle (Trois-Rivières, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I want to commend my colleague. I know she is totally devoted to the people of her riding.

I note in particular the injustice her constituents feel is being committed with the Conservative government's bill, which seeks to marginalize the Quebec nation. Quebec, which is a founding nation of Canada, has had to fight for more than 400 years to defend its language and culture. It is natural for people to think it is unfair for the government to want to decrease Quebec's political weight.

Does she not think that Quebec as a nation could be accommodated? That would be important to us.

Mrs. Claude DeBellefeuille: Mr. Speaker, in the history of Canada, a number of exceptions have been made for other provinces to accommodate the various unique characteristics they might have. We feel that, if exceptions have been made for other provinces in the history of Canada, then why not make an exception for Quebec and be accommodating enough to recognize, once and for all, the Quebec nation?

Ms. Paule Brunelle (Trois-Rivières, BQ) Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to speak to this motion on this Bloc Québécois opposition day. It is a motion that seeks to condemn the marginalization of the Quebec nation. The key point to retain is that Quebec really is a unique nation through its history, its values and its language. Quebecers have always known this and they are very proud of it. For over 400 years, on North American soil, we have been fighting to preserve this unique culture and we are defending our rights to express ourselves in the language of Molière on an Anglo-Saxon continent. For us, it has been an ongoing battle to preserve both the quality of the language and its presence in all our institutions.

In 2006, the Conservative government recognized Quebec as a nation. Too little, too late, some would say. We had to wait almost 140 years for the federal Parliament to recognize the people of Quebec. We are talking about 140 years of denying the existence of a culture that transcends our borders and resonates around the world today.

The Conservatives still have the same old habits: a lot of promises, a lot of talk, but very few results. This recognition seems more like lip service. It shows no real willingness to allow for the full development of the people of Quebec. Fairness for Quebec as a founding people is being a nation free to express its priorities and make its own choices. For that to be possible, it is vital that Quebec keep a political weight that takes its national reality into account.

Business of Supply

Unfortunately, the federal government does not share the same vision. In 2007, the Conservatives introduced a bill to change the electoral map, with the result that the voice of the Quebec nation within the Canadian federation was weakened. Last April, they did it again with a similar new bill. By constantly seeking to marginalize the Quebec nation, the federal government is sending Quebecers the message that, in its view, democratic representation is, above all, representation for other Canadians at the expense of Quebec's fundamental interests. As we said earlier, it is not surprising that, right now, Quebecers feel that this situation is profoundly unfair.

Section 51 of the Constitution guarantees 75 seats for Quebec. However, this guarantee in no way protects the political weight of Quebec because these 75 seats are constantly weakened by the addition of seats elsewhere in Canada. Furthermore, in a majority decision handed down in 1991, the Supreme Court of Canada wrote: "The purpose of the right to vote enshrined in s. 3 of the Charter is not equality of voting power per se but the right to 'effective representation'".

In Quebec's case, "effective representation" is a guarantee that its unique and distinct nature will be preserved and, consequently, that it will get the political tools it needs to achieve that. In the Canadian logic of nation building, there is no place for the Quebec national reality. Due to Quebec's special status, the 1992 Charlottetown accord guaranteed that the province would always have at least 25% of the seats in the House of Commons, but it failed. For Quebec, it was not enough, and for the rest of Canada, it was far too much.

Reneguing on its good intentions at the time, today, the federal government does not hesitate to introduce a bill that would reduce Quebec's representation in Ottawa to less than 22%. We must go back more than half a century, to 1952 to be exact, to see the last increase in Quebec's representation in the House of Commons. Since then, the total number of seats in the House keeps on rising while that of Quebec remains the same.

In 2007, with its bill C-56, the Conservative government tried to add 22 new seats outside Quebec. Bill C-12, introduced last April by the Conservatives, adds another 30 new seats in three provinces: Ontario, Alberta and British Columbia.

If you look at statistics for the last five years, you will see that the population of Ontario increased by 550,000, while the populations of Alberta, British Columbia and Quebec increased by 350,000, 260,000 and 250,000 respectively.

• (1540)

Elsewhere, there has been almost no change. Why is it that the first three provinces are entitled to 18, 7 and 5 additional seats respectively, while Quebec gets nothing, even though it has a quarter of a million more citizens? Why would Quebec see its representation go from 24.3% to 22.7% of all seats when it has 23.2% of the population?

In our view, the Conservative strategy is clear. Not only will these new seats allow the election of a majority government, but they will also continue to isolate Quebec and to marginalize the Quebec nation. That is why it is unacceptable to the Bloc Québécois.

Quebeckers are unanimous on this point. In a motion, the National Assembly demands that the federal government abandon the idea of

introducing a bill that will reduce Quebec's weight in the House of Commons. This issue is not of concern to politicians only. An Angus Reid poll of April 7, 2010 showed that 71% of Quebecers were against such bill.

I would like to conclude by saying that it is important, in recognizing the Quebec nation, to acknowledge the representation of its elected members and its fair weight in the Canadian federation.

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member for Trois-Rivières has three minutes remaining.

Ms. Paule Brunelle: Mr. Speaker, I would like to come back to the issue of the Quebec nation.

If the government is going to be consistent with respect to recognizing the Quebec nation, it has to put forward an electoral reform proposal recognizing the national character of Quebec and ensuring, as a minimum, that Quebec will maintain a political weight sufficient to allow it to uphold its distinctiveness.

So far, the Quebec nation has repeatedly been met with refusal from the federal government. We can think of our request for companies under federal jurisdiction to respect the use of French as the language of work. The federal government refuses to take into consideration the existence of our national culture in the application of all its legislation and in the operation of its institutions with cultural or identity significance. It maintains an approach to multiculturalism which excludes the Quebec culture. It is important to understand that, in our view, interculturalism is definitely the way to preserve the French language, which is the general language common to everyone who lives in Quebec.

The government also refuses to recognize that, being a different nation, our society developed differently and has unique needs and interests that have to be taken into account. That is why the Bloc Québécois is here, in the House of Commons. We are here to constantly remind the government of this.

In addition, the government has refused to give us our own radio-television and telecommunications commission to make regulations based on the interests and challenges unique to Quebec. Several others examples could be provided. It is important for federalist parties not to try to put Quebec in a minority position in this House.

The Bloc Québécois will continue to fight to maintain Quebec's political weight and enough seats in the House. In our opinion, what we need is a political weight of 100%. That is what we call political freedom. or sovereignty.

• (1545)

Hon. Joseph Volpe (Eglinton—Lawrence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I continue to be surprised. The speech by the member from Trois-Rivières leads me to believe that there is a strong bond with Canada because Quebec can have no weight unless there is a vibrant Canada. I congratulate her for she has spoken eloquently about the future of Canada. She wants Quebec to have some weight in the existing and future Canada, which will have a certain vibrancy.

Business of Supply

I have to admit that I also heard in her speech a complaint, that I believe is legitimate, about the fact that the Conservatives have abandoned a future for Canada that includes Quebec. That comes across in her speech, and I hear her speaking on behalf of the citizens of Quebec. She calls them a nation, but she says that they want their place in Canada and the possibility of continuing to participate in the future of Canada. The Conservatives want nothing to do with that. They do not wish to keep Quebec in Canada. They have abandoned Quebecers and the province of Quebec.

Is that not how I should interpret this speech?

Ms. Paule Brunelle: Mr. Speaker, I applaud the member's efforts to put words in my mouth that I did not utter. I am not calling for a place in Canada, but we are still here. Soon, I will be paying my taxes to the federal government and I would like to have my fair share of these taxes. I want respect for the Quebec nation. I want it to be recognized as a nation. I want fairness and to have my fair share.

For that reason, as long as Quebecers are not sovereign, we will have to stay here to ensure that there is sound management. We often speak of managing funds like a good parent. Those who govern us for the time being must ensure that we receive a fair share of our contribution to Canada.

I am certainly not looking for Quebec to play an even greater role in Canada, but I want more political weight in order to move forward.

Hon. Joseph Volpe: Mr. Speaker, it is not my intention to put any words in anyone's mouth, but once again, I listened to what was said. Perhaps my colleague from across the floor sensed and heard the same thing. The Bloc Québécois wants to maintain its position within Canada and here in the House of Commons to engage in nation building. The goal of all the members of the House is to ensure that this nation building happens despite the Conservatives' efforts to abandon Quebec and Quebecers.

Ms. Paule Brunelle: Mr. Speaker, I agree that the Conservatives are trying to abandon Quebec and Quebecers. The Liberals have also made many similar attempts and I am sure they will again in the future.

I would remind the hon. member that it was in a unanimous vote that Quebec denounced this weakening of its democratic weight, and this despite the fact that we have a Liberal federalist government in power in Quebec. In 2007 Benoît Pelletier said that special measures were needed to protect Quebec. He said that Quebec “—represents the main linguistic minority in Canada, is a founding province of Canada and is losing demographic weight. Why could Quebec not be accommodated because of its status as a nation and a national minority within Canada?”

Benoît Pelletier is a federalist. So the debate is not between federalists and sovereignists. It is a question of knowing how we can be properly represented based on what we are entitled to.

• (1550)

The Deputy Speaker: I wish to inform the House that because of the ministerial statement, government orders will be extended by 10 minutes.

[English]

It is my duty pursuant to Standing Order 38 to inform the House that the questions to be raised tonight at the time of adjournment are as follows: the hon. member for Winnipeg South Centre, Status of Women; the hon. member for Edmonton—Strathcona, the Environment.

[Translation]

Mr. Steven Blaney (Lévis—Bellechasse, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise before my colleague, the hon. member for Lanark—Frontenac—Lennox and Addington, who will also take part in today's debate.

It is a pleasure to have such an opportunity this afternoon, as the federal Conservative member for the Quebec riding of Lévis—Bellechasse and Les Etchemins. For almost five years now, with the support of my Conservative colleagues, I have been able to ensure that Quebec is treated like it as rarely been within the Canadian federation.

One only has to think about the record and historic transfers for health and education from the Canadian government to Quebec. The purpose of these transfers is to allow the province to maintain quality services for its population, despite the economic disturbances that we have experienced.

Thanks to our strong banking system and to the measures implemented by our government through its economic action plan—which is now in its second year—all the provinces, including Quebec, and all the territories in Canada are faring much better than many other western countries.

I am proud to say that the Conservative government is making, in all Canadian municipalities and major cities, the highest investments of the past 50 years.

I made announcements at Laval and at the Université du Québec en Abitibi-Témiscamingue. There is also the Pavillon des Premiers-Peuples—the first nations pavilion—which is becoming a reality in Val-d'Or.

Closer to Lévis—Bellechasse, the government has invested in the water treatment plant that I often drive by, to help Lévis expand. We have also invested in small municipalities such as Buckland and Saint-Philémon, which had drinking water problems. These municipalities also want to keep people in the Bellechasse and Les Etchemins region. We support the development of infrastructures that will promote recreational and tourism initiatives.

The Conservative government has members who represent Quebec. I have not yet mentioned the record investments in culture. We have systematically increased Radio-Canada's funding since we came to power. We invest in cultural events, both large and small. I am referring to the celebrations that are held throughout Quebec and Canada, as well as the Francolies, which received a historic investment in order to promote the festival, one of the world's largest cultural events promoting the French language. That funding was granted under the economic action plan put in place by our government.

Business of Supply

With that in mind, I am pleased to respond to the motion brought forward by the hon. member for Joliette, who incorrectly accused our government of diminishing Quebec's political weight in the House of Commons by introducing a bill on demographic representation. It is very clear that demographic representation in the House is based on the underlying principle of representation by population.

I defend that principle as a member from Quebec in the House, but generations of Quebeckers have defended it before me. There are even some famous Quebeckers who defend it to this day and who did so well before I did. I am thinking, among others, of a Quebec premier who said he was not opposed to having political representation reflect the democratic evolution of the populations of eastern and western Canada.

Of course, if the members of the Bloc were not so stubborn and single-minded in their ideological obsession of separation, they would see that representation by population—one person, one vote—is an underlying principle of democracy. I am certain they would be willing to consider that if it is good in theory, it is good in practice. That is what Premier Pierre-Joseph-Olivier Chauveau said, for that matter, back in 1847.

● (1555)

Quebeckers then said that they were capable of taking on and, in fact, defending a basic democratic principle, the principle of representation by population. Two points must certainly be considered in that context. Of course, we remember the grandfather clause, which is maintained in the bill, and also the senatorial clause, which is also maintained in the bill.

So this bill aims to have this House reflect the greatest population increases in some regions of the country. That is what demographic weight means. I will have the opportunity to come back to it.

But then there is political weight. I have already stated that what is marginalizing Quebec here in this House is not necessarily the number of Quebeckers, but the role that certain of its members of Parliament are playing. I am thinking of my colleagues from the Bloc, whose political weight is being called into question. These are not my words. I have here a quotation from a former sovereignist militant who lives in Laval, Mr. Dominique Valiquette. He expressed his views in *La Presse* in September 2009. Of course, we are talking about political weight, because I have just clearly shown that Quebec's demographic weight is maintained and assured in this bill. Mr. Valiquette said the following about political weight:

The Bloc Québécois no longer has any reason to exist. By its mere presence, it has doomed Canada to live under a minority government for a number of years...The Bloc deserves its name more and more, since its minority blocks the "national" parties from getting the members they need in Quebec to form a majority government. It also blocks Quebeckers from being represented forcefully in cabinet and from contributing to the major decisions that shape the future of Quebec and of Canada...In conclusion, I ask myself how a party forever destined to sit on the opposition benches can effectively and constructively defend the interests of Quebec.

Those were his words and he ended by saying that the only goal still in the Bloc Québécois' reach seems to be to secure a comfortable retirement for its members. That is the difference between demographic weight and political weight.

We see that some Quebeckers, for instance during the last byelection, chose to increase Quebec's political weight. How? By making sure that the Canadian government, the party currently running the country, gained another member, and I am thinking of my colleague from Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup, a Conservative Quebec member, who is one more voice not only to represent and defend the interests of Quebec, but also to act on behalf of its interests here, within the government caucus. Just last week, we announced the extension of the transitional provisions. And my colleague from Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup knows something about that.

The Democratic Representation Act is the result of our commitment in the 2010 Speech from the Throne to solve the problem of the under-representation of the growing number of Canadians living in Ontario, Alberta and British Columbia.

The population of these three provinces is increasing much faster than that of the other provinces, which means that we find ourselves with a democratic deficit that we must address here in this House. And the way to do so is by introducing a bill based on the principle of representation by population, while respecting, on one hand, both criteria of the senatorial clause and, on the other hand, the 1985 grandfather clause.

These inequities are the result of a formula contained in the 1985 Act on Representation. This formula aimed at limiting the increase in the total number of seats in the House of Commons while guaranteeing that no province would find itself with fewer seats than it had when this Act was adopted. The guarantee of a minimum number of seats for the provinces with a weaker population growth is commonly referred to as the grandfather clause.

We can thus see that this bill's only objective is to ensure that the representation in the House reflects a greater population growth in certain provinces.

● (1600)

Quebec also stands to gain, by knowing that Quebec's rights and its number of seats will be maintained, and by knowing that if Quebec's population should increase more, proportionally speaking, than that of other regions of the country, Quebec will have more representatives. I hope that this will be within national governments so that we can also increase Quebec's political weight.

Hon. Joseph Volpe (Eglinton—Lawrence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the member for Lévis—Bellechasse is always animated when he speaks in this House. He is obviously a federalist, and obviously a Quebecker, but above all, he is a Conservative. That is clear in the way he is trying to steal all the credit for the nation building that happened before he was around.

Business of Supply

When he said that the Conservative Party had made a massive transfer to Quebec, that was not the whole truth. I would like to take a minute to explain to him what happened before he was elected to this House. Five years ago, before this Conservative government, the Liberals had already announced, approved and initiated an annual transfer of \$1 billion for public health to Quebec for the following 10 years. Let us think about that for a moment. At the same time, the Liberals gave Quebec an additional \$2 billion in equalization payments. That is an extra \$3 billion. Where are the Conservatives getting their numbers from?

Mr. Steven Blaney: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague from Eglinton—Lawrence for his question. He appears to be in good shape. No doubt he gets a lot of energy from his tai chi practice, and I congratulate him on doing it almost daily.

That being said, I must point out that my colleague is not in a very good position to be criticizing the Conservative government's role and our initiatives for Quebec. Let us not forget that it was the Liberal Party of Canada, unfortunately, that sabotaged the Meech Lake accord, an accord to bring Quebec back into the Canadian Constitution. That is what brought the Bloc Québécois into being. Unfortunately, the Liberal Party of Canada helped create a unique situation in Canada in which much of Quebec's political weight has been on the opposition benches for nearly 20 years now. That is most regrettable.

Also regrettable is the fact that when the federal government cut public funding—

•(1605)

The Deputy Speaker: Questions and comments. The hon. member for Trois-Rivières.

Ms. Paule Brunelle (Trois-Rivières, BQ): Mr. Speaker, for a Quebec member to say such things is deplorable. I would like him to reflect for a moment. Let us indulge in a little science fiction. Say the Conservative government manages to get a majority and reduce Quebec's political weight. What happens then? With the spending power that the federal government exercises so freely, it takes over our areas of jurisdiction, spends money in those areas against the wishes of Quebecers, against their language, their culture and their financial and economic interests.

I do not understand how such a clever politician can fail to see that political weight is important in a forum like the House of Commons. If the sovereignists are the only ones supporting this position, then how is it that Quebec's National Assembly unanimously passed a motion in which Jean Charest's federalist government expressed its desire to maintain Quebec's political weight in the House?

I would urge the member to be extremely careful in attempting to justify this move. When he talks about all of the wonderful things he is handing out to the ridings, he should remember that it is my money he is giving away. I see no reason for him to take any credit for that.

Mr. Steven Blaney: Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my colleague from Trois-Rivières for her question on today's debate. It is quite simple. As the saying goes: *vox populi vox Dei*. We must recognize the legitimacy of the people who are elected here. I believe we are in a democratic forum.

That being said, I want to remind my colleague that the Bloc Québécois is over-represented here in the House with respect to the percentage of votes in Quebec. I would also like to remind her that a former P.Q. minister responsible for democratic reform said that, as a democrat, he could not oppose the fact that Canada wants representation based on relative demographic weight. He said his fight for democratic reform in Quebec was based on this principle, and that he could hardly say that principle was logical for Quebec, but not for Canada.

I say that if it is good for Quebec, then it is good for Canada.

[English]

Mr. Scott Reid (Lanark—Frontenac—Lennox and Addington, CPC): Mr. Speaker, today we are talking to the motion put forward by the members of the Bloc Québécois. However, I think we all understand that the motion was put forward because the government put forward Bill C-12, a law that would go some distance to restoring representation by population in the House of Commons. Therefore, I will be referring to both the motion and the bill as I proceed.

I want members to cast their minds back to the situation that existed in Canada prior to 1867. At that time, the province of Canada had two parts, Canada east and Canada west, what are today Quebec and Ontario, which were frozen into equal shares of the legislative assembly. The lack of representation by population, the lack of an ability to reflect the changing population numbers of the two component parts of what was then the province of Canada was arguably the leading force behind the move toward confederation.

In confederation in 1867, we developed a model that was the same model used in all of the world's major successful, long-lasting federations, a model of having two houses, a senate and House of Commons, in which one house had equal representation by region and the other house had equal representation by population.

In the case of Canada, there are four regions in the Senate, the Atlantic, Quebec, Ontario and the west. Each of them is given 24 seats. In the case of the Americans, it is two seats for each of their fifty states. The Australians give 12 seats for each of their states. In Switzerland, it is two seats for each canton. I could go on describing the other federations.

In the lower house, the opposite rule prevails, representation by population, or, as the Australians put it, one vote-one value. In the lower house, every member's vote should reflect an equal number of constituents and, therefore, every Canadian elector's vote should be equal in weight to that of every other Canadian elector.

What has happened in Canada, unlike these other federations, is we have gradually moved away from those two principles. In the upper house we have made one compromise and, fortunately, only one, but when Newfoundland was brought into confederation in 1949, it was brought into the Atlantic region, in population terms the smallest region, and was given six extra seats. Therefore, one region actually does not have equal weight by region.

Business of Supply

In the House of Commons, we have repeatedly moved further and further away from the idea of representation by population through amendments to the Constitution, first in 1915, to the formula in 1946, in 1952, in 1974 and, finally, in 1985. With some limitation, it is accurate to say that each time we moved further and further away from the idea that every Canadian's vote should have equal weight, the foundational principle of the House was being set aside. Bill C-12 seeks to re-establish that principle.

Before I turn to Bill C-12, I want to talk for a moment about just how far we have moved from representation by population. A recent study was put out by the Mowat Centre for Policy Innovation. It points out that if the average Canadian vote is given a value of one, we will find that only one province in the entire country has a relatively close value to that number, and that is Quebec.

In Ontario the average vote is only worth 0.9 or 90% of the average, 0.92 in Alberta and 0.90 in British Columbia. On the other hand, if we look at some of the smaller provinces, we will see a wide variation from that. A vote in Saskatchewan is worth 1.39. Measured against a vote in Alberta, that means that a vote in Saskatchewan is worth 50% more or, to flip it around, a voter in Alberta has a vote that is worth only two-thirds as much as a vote in Saskatchewan. The trend is for that to continue with each census getting more and more extreme. Bill C-12 seeks to set that situation right.

The Bloc Québécois is attempting to say is that it just wants to move aside for one province. That is in fact an effort to lock in one more exception, to go down the same wrong path, although in the service of a different part of the country, a path that we went down in 1915, 1952, 1974 and so on. What needs to happen is a return to the foundational principle in the lower house. Bill C-12 would accomplish that.

• (1610)

It is worth noting as well that just as Bill C-12 seeks to start re-establishing the foundational principle of the House of Commons, the Senate legislation proposed by the government does the same thing for the upper house. Right now we have an upper house which represents on the basis of region, but it is not an elected house and it is not, as we old Reformers would say, an effective house. Remember the famous triple E, equal, elected, effective? It has some element of equality by region, but it is not elected at all, therefore is not effective. It is not seen as a legitimate counterweight to the lower house.

Because of that fact, the representation principle based in the Senate is absent. We need to correct both that principle and set it straight to a foundational level where the Senate can operate as a sober and equal house of second thought and where the House of Commons can function to provide representation by population for everybody across the country. These two have to be seen as a package.

As the Bloc Québécois members are proposing this, they are forgetting that there is a package at work here, an effort to set straight the original foundational Confederation deal in both houses.

I want to point out that we have tried in the past in the country to accomplish a version of what the Bloc Québécois has done today with its motion, which is to say that it is not opposed to

representation by population as long as one-quarter of the seats are reserved for Quebec, or as it has amended its motion, 24.3% are preserved for Quebec.

The problem is we cannot say we will overweight the proportional value for one part of the country permanently without having the effect to permanently underweight votes in another part of the country. Ultimately sharing the representational pie is a zero sum game. We cannot give to one without taking from another, and that is effectively what is being done.

Although I am sure it is not the intention, and I am sure this is done with good will, the reality is what the Bloc Québécois has proposed to do is to say to everyone in my province and also in British Columbia and Alberta that they should be permanently under-represented, their votes should permanently be worth less, they should permanently have a lower proportion of the representational pie. They should accept that they are less of a democratic participant and to this extent disenfranchised. Clearly that is not in keeping with the Confederation deal to which our ancestors all agreed.

This was tried once before as I mentioned. It was tried in 1990 with the Charlottetown accord, an accord that stated they were seeking to adjust the House of Commons "to better reflect the principle of representation by population". However, that was subject to a requirement "a guarantee that Quebec would be assigned no fewer than 25 percent of the seats in the House of Commons".

Once they said that, a whole series of other things kicked in. The principle that no small province should have a larger number of people per riding than a large province had to be set aside wherever it conflicted with the principle that Quebec had 25% of the seats. Fundamentally, a problem was created which would, had this been adopted, become worse and worse over time.

I want to draw the attention of member to one last thought. There was a time in the 1940s when the population trend was reversed. At that time, Quebec's population was rapidly increasing. That of Ontario and other provinces had been flat due to a lower birth rate during the 1930s and a lack of immigration during the Depression and the second world war. When it came time for redistribution, Ontario's representation and that of the western provinces was to fall. This could have been resolved by freezing our proportional representation at the levels they were at. That would have resulted in Quebecers being deprived of some of the representation they deserved.

Happily a wiser solution was found. The total number of seats in the House was increased. The Quebecers enjoyed the numbers they deserved and Ontarians and others were not deprived of actual seats. That spirit, which animated our legislation in 1946, animates again the legislation being proposed in Bill C-12.

I encourage all members of the House, including members of the Bloc Québécois, to support that and that would mean, by necessity, to vote against the motion.

Business of Supply

•(1615)

Hon. Joseph Volpe (Eglinton—Lawrence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I find it interesting that we would be talking about some of the constitutional precedents and the ideologies that were nascent in the 1860s when we were trying to bring together a confederation.

One of the foundational principles the hon. member refers to is that the Senate was essentially the senior House. It was the place that would count because it would represent the interests of provinces. Today, a more cynical scholar might turn around and say that it designed to represent the interests of the governments of those provinces and that the rep by pop principle to which he refers was really one that was democratic and alien to the period of people having a freedom and a democratic right to have their voices heard in the context of this chamber.

What the member has really said is that the Constitution, all those principles and all those details that were put down on paper some 140-plus years ago, is essentially a living document. However, things change over time.

He refers to the other place as not effective, and it is definitely not elected, is, in part, a response to his Prime Minister's decision to appoint 30% of the membership of that place and put it in the position where it will have absolutely nothing to do except represent his voice.

I find it a little odd that we would try to have a scholarly discussion about the merits of rep by pop, as citizens represent themselves in this place, which is designed to represent the democratic will of the people, while, at the same time, he decides that it is okay to have a chamber where only the voice of the Prime Minister counts.

•(1620)

Mr. Scott Reid: Mr. Speaker, regarding the member's first point, he suggested that the Senate might have been intended originally to represent the governments of the various provinces. Not the Senate of Canada, the American senate, as originally set up, was appointed by the state legislatures and was intended to represent the state governments or the state legislatures. However, ours was never set up with that in mind.

Vis-à-vis the appointment by the Prime Minister of a substantial number of senators, I can only point out that this is as a result of the fact that the Liberals in the Senate, and in here as well, blocked every piece of Senate legislation we brought forward. We would at this point, were it not for Liberal blocking, have Senate elections in place. There was legislation brought forward within the first year this government was in place. Perhaps the member has forgotten that.

Mr. Chris Warkentin (Peace River, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is an honour to stand and ask a question this afternoon. It is an important debate, one that really cuts the cord of the principle of democracy in our nation today.

I will reference the question just asked. I am proud to serve under a prime minister who actually appointed the first sitting senator who was elected by the people of my province, the province of Alberta. The Prime Minister has made it clear that he will continue to respond and reflect on the will of different provinces as they elect those senators. The province of Alberta will continue that process, I

believe, this October, and will bring forward another slate of senators-in-waiting.

I have the privilege of representing one of the largest populations, as far as a riding goes, in the province of Alberta. We have very distinct communities within my riding. We have a number of French communities, communities that have descendants who have come from the province to Quebec to set up their homes. Right now they are disproportionately unrepresented in the House as a result of the current system. I represent nearly 150,000 people in my constituency.

Does the hon. member have any comment as it relates to those folks who live in my riding, who maybe have distinct cultures and have distinct concerns with regard to language, and who still are under-represented in the House as a result of our current setup today and that this legislation would rectify?

Mr. Scott Reid: Mr. Speaker, I have to correct one thing my colleague said.

Senator Brown was the second senator who was elected in Alberta and appointed to the upper House. The first was Senator Stan Waters. He was appointed about 20 years ago by Prime Minister Mulroney. He was quite reluctant to make the appointment, but ultimately did so and respected the will of Alberta voters. Therefore, it has happened twice now.

With regard to members of various minority communities within the rest of the country, obviously, everybody has the right to a vote that is worth the same amount as everybody else's vote. That is one thing in which we really should be all equal, regardless of race, culture, religion, or any other thing that might divide us.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Francine Lalonde (La Pointe-de-l'Île, BQ) Mr. Speaker, first, I would like to advise you that I will be sharing my time with the member for Saint-Jean.

About two months ago, I organized a lunch meeting in my constituency as I do regularly. It usually takes place on a Sunday. Constituents are invited, not just party members. The topic for discussion at that meeting was the *Globe and Mail* article at the time that looked at the question of the increase in the number of seats for the three provinces where the population had grown the most.

The participants were extremely interested and extremely shocked at the same time. It must be said that, for Quebec, this is another in a series of irritants that Quebec has been dealing with for some time.

Of course, the apparent recognition of the Quebec nation by the government put a little salve on the wounds that these irritants have caused, but this bill rips open the biggest gash once more. Yes, Canada has finally recognized the Quebec nation. But what does that recognition mean? It means that, in a measure as specific as the number of seats in the House of Commons, Quebec finds itself not only disadvantaged at this point in time, but disadvantaged forever, given that the population increase in the three western provinces shows no sign of slowing down.

Business of Supply

For reasons that are easy to understand and to accept, Quebec cannot expect such a rapid growth in its population. The Quebec nation cannot be recognized if that unique situation is not recognized. To do otherwise is to freely admit that the intent was to deceive people, and I use the word deceive advisedly. What is more important than political weight in trying to preserve the French language and culture of Quebec at the federal level?

I listened to the arguments on representation by population. I understand its significance in the history of various countries. I also know, and it must have been repeated today, that the intellectuals who work for the parties and those who teach university students have a different understanding of representation by population than the Conservative party. At the time of Confederation, it was agreed that representation by population did not mean a strict representation based on the population, but a representation based on the population as it was recognized at the time of Confederation.

● (1625)

I want to stress the conditions that make it so that Quebec's population cannot increase as quickly. You know why, as do the members across the way from Quebec. It is necessary, in my humble opinion, to recognize, as the members of the National Assembly of Quebec have done unanimously, that Quebec, whose culture is deeply rooted in its French origins and whose doors have been opened wide to immigrants, still has a serious problem: getting its many immigrants who come from various countries and who have settled in a country next to the United States, whose population overwhelmingly speaks English, to adopt its French-language culture.

We know—and it needs to be stated and recognized today—that in world history and for some time, the dominant language was French, especially in terms of diplomacy. Today, the lingua franca, that used to be French, is said to be English.

Not only are the immigrants arriving in British Columbia and Alberta predisposed to learn English, but they often already speak it because they learned it in their home countries. It is extremely easy for them to integrate, even though we do not agree with Canada's multicultural policy as it tends to lead to ghettos.

But in Quebec, even though Quebecers are extremely open, this is clearly harder for them. They need to find appropriate ways to help immigrants integrate—I am not saying “assimilate”—into Quebec's culture and learn French. When I say that Quebec has to find ways to do this, I should point out that the government thought Bill 101 was one way to help immigrants integrate. But what happened was that people and parents got together with foundations or wealthy people to take advantage of a provision of Bill 101 that allowed children who had gone to English-language private schools to then be educated in the English public school system, at no cost. People would pay tuition in the English private school system for one, two or three years to ensure that not only one child, but his or her brothers and sisters and their descendants could go to school in English. That is significant.

It means that, to increase its population, Quebec has to attract immigrants that it must try hard to integrate into the French language and culture, but it faces some major obstacles.

Is it normal that despite Quebec's openness to immigration and despite the recent rise in the birth rate that everyone is so happy about, population growth in Quebec is slower? No, but it is not surprising.

I am very sad in one way and very angry in another that we are being forced into this fight, because there is no other way to resolve this issue.

● (1630)

Ms. Paule Brunelle (Trois-Rivières, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I want to commend my colleague. We have benefited from her vast experience as a historian. What struck me were her comments on the frustrations of Quebec and Quebecers.

When we talk about preserving the French language, many Supreme Court rulings—the Supreme Court is like the leaning tower of Pisa, it always leans toward the same side—have overturned entire sections of Bill 101, the only tool we had to protect language in Quebec. It is frustrating. Now they want to frustrate us even more by limiting Quebec's political weight in the House.

Does my colleague not think that exceptions should be made because of the unique circumstances specific to our Quebec nation, a founding nation of Canada, this nation that resists, and that we must act quickly in order to get the government to put a stop to all these frustrations?

● (1635)

Ms. Francine Lalonde: Mr. Speaker, the motion moved by the Bloc is just a start. Despite everything I am hearing, I hope this motion will pass. Indeed, there have been very many frustrations. However, I would like to remind hon. members that 15 years ago, in a referendum whose results some people did everything in their power to influence as we were to learn later, Quebec came within 54,000 votes of getting sovereignty. Many worked hard on making sure sovereignty would not happen.

I was here during that time. It was a time when we had to be very friendly or else tear our hair out, but it did not come to that.

Instead of wanting to make Quebecers pay for this lost opportunity later, English Canada could have looked for a solution—unsatisfactory to most Quebecers, but satisfactory to others perhaps—and certainly could have ensured the survival of our culture. But that was not to be.

Today, they think this story is long forgotten. They are proposing rep by pop with no regard for the rules established at the time of Confederation.

Mr. Claude Bachand (Saint-Jean, BQ) Mr. Speaker, I am pleased today to express my views in the debate that my party has brought to this House. I am also proud to rise as a Quebecer, which may not be the case for every Quebecer sitting in the House. I gather from some speeches that there are members from Quebec who would be quite happy for Quebec's power to be reduced.

Business of Supply

I want to refer to the motion that was passed in this House on November 22, 2006, the motion on the recognition of Quebec nation. Since that time, the Bloc has maintained that this cannot be just a symbolic recognition. The recognition must be legal, real, and attentive to what is happening in Quebec. The Bloc has entered the fray on a number of occasions on a whole range of issues. Now, the Conservative government, which often connives with the Liberals, has systematically shut the door on that.

The Conservative legislation intends to add 30 seats. People will say that that is not so bad. I would like to say that, but where are these seats to be added? Eighteen are to be added in Ontario, seven in British Columbia, five in Alberta and none in Quebec. If I understand correctly, the number will go from 308 seats to 338, with the number of seats in Quebec remaining the same, at 75. People tell us that Quebec has 75 seats and that we have been promised that the number will always be maintained. But when the number is diluted because seats are added, we lose some of our power.

I will not accept members from Quebec saying in this House that it is normal for Quebec to lose its political weight. I have even heard people tell us that, if we had a few more children, we would have more representation. Is that the solution when we see that the government has been systematically diluting Quebec's political weight? When political weight is reduced, it does not take a rocket scientist to see that some power is going to be lost. We want to promote our nation's fundamental values, but, if others do not share them, we have less chance of success. That is the fundamental issue.

For instance, there is the matter of French and the Canada Labour Code. Quebec has a law that we are very proud of. Quebec is surrounded by a sea of anglophones. People need to understand once and for all that if we do not have legislation to prevent the systematic progression of English in North America, if we do not have laws to protect our language, it will disappear.

That would represent a loss not only for Quebec, but also for North America, for Canada and the entire world. When languages weaken and disappear, as is the case for many aboriginal languages, it represents a loss for world heritage. We should be given the opportunity to defend our language, but that does not happen. Since its inception, Bill 101 has been constantly under attack.

I agree with my colleague from Trois-Rivières: the Supreme Court always leans toward the same side and Duplessis said the same thing before us. We are told that Bill 101 is unfair and discriminatory, that the poor anglophones in Quebec are being persecuted. That is simply not true. They have their own health care and education systems, from elementary school to the university level.

People need to stop taking us for fools. Anglophones in Quebec have their own way of seeing things; they are not being persecuted. But we must always sacrifice ourselves. People talk about the supreme law of the Supreme Court, which decides what will ultimately be enforced. French is constantly being diluted in each and every decision. On the island of Montreal, English is becoming more common and soon it will be the language spoken by the majority. This is not normal in a francophone Quebec, especially since the law requires that French be the language of work. This is less and less the case.

We are not getting any help integrating newcomers into our society.

• (1640)

They are encouraged to retain their basic culture, which is the Canadian multiculturalism policy. We are always at odds. In the end, Quebec's importance is always diminished, not just legally and politically here, but also on a daily basis.

I could talk about many other aspects, such as the differences in the two societies, nations and peoples. Why is it that Quebeckers do not view the youth criminal justice system in the same way? The answer is simple. Just look at the statistics. We are doing better than the rest of English Canada, and yet they want to impose Canada-wide programs on us. The laws apply to everyone and do not make exceptions for Quebeckers.

That is in direct conflict with our youth criminal justice system, which does a better job of rehabilitating young offenders than the system elsewhere in Canada. What does the rest of Canada want? It wants tough laws that will be applied to 14 and 15 year olds. It wants them to gain an education in crime by putting them in jail very early on. That is the perfect recipe if you want to fail and put off Quebeckers. The Quebec nation is different from Canada.

The same goes for the firearms registry. Since the Conservatives came to power, they have tried to get rid of the registry. The opposition parties are scared, except for the Bloc Québécois. Remember that the mass murder at the École Polytechnique happened in Quebec. I get calls from mothers who lost their daughters in that tragedy and who beg us to keep the firearms registry. We can understand. How is it that our counterparts in English Canada cannot understand? What is the answer in their view?

We still have to register our cars, our cats and our dogs. Are we going to carry around firearms without registering them? I have to say it is shocking for those who maintain law and order. Police groups want to keep the registry because they know exactly what will happen during an intervention. If they have to go into a home, they know if it is supposed to contain firearms or not. It is not hard to understand. That is just more proof that we are not able to see eye to eye.

Furthermore, the idea of adding another 30 seats is all about getting votes. The Conservative government has given up on Quebec. It figured that it had annoyed Quebec so much that the province was fed up and would definitely not vote for the government. So since Quebeckers will not vote Conservative, and the government could potentially lose seats in Quebec, it would win some back by adding another 30.

When we have a majority Conservative government, it will certainly be interesting in this House, in Canada and in Quebec. It will be terrible, because the Conservatives have a different approach than we do in Quebec, and they cannot accept that there are different approaches. Everything has to be Canada-wide; it must apply across the board, from coast to coast to coast. That is the way they do things.

Business of Supply

Representation by population is the major argument put forth by our adversaries here. They say that it is important and that Quebec cannot have more seats because the aim is to have 100,000 residents per electoral riding. I would like someone to explain to me why Prince Edward Island, which has a population of 125,000, has four members of Parliament. Of course, that exception is provided for in the Constitution. There are always exceptions when it comes time to give more seats or more powers to English Canada.

But for us, everything is by the book. We are not given any exceptions, even though we were one of the founding peoples. History should perhaps be taken into account in this debate. That is not the case. If English Canada likes it, representation by population it will be, end of story. It is fine if there are exceptions elsewhere in Canada, such as Prince Edward Island, because provisions were made for that.

I am proud to be a Quebecker. I am also proud of the Bloc Québécois, which will obviously support its motion, and which will object to this kind of bill that is trying to diminish Quebec's political power. I hope that the Quebeckers in this House will side with the Quebec people, and not just with the Canadian people. I remind them that according to the November 26, 2006, motion, there are two nations.

•(1645)

We must defend our nation. The Bloc Québécois is proud to defend its nation and to defend the interests of Quebec, which the Conservatives have completely disregarded in this bill.

Mr. John Weston (West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast—Sea to Sky Country, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I listened carefully to my friend opposite. I, too, am very proud of Quebec. I have spent a lot of time in Quebec City. I worked for the Quebec government when René Lévesque was premier, and my children are in French immersion.

Even though I represent British Columbia, I am proud of the growth of the French language throughout the country. But, at the same time, I recognize that there is more than one way of seeing Canada. There are the people, as well. There are elected representatives such as myself who represent 129,000 people. There is no sense of equality between other members and those who must represent so many people.

So, I have to ask. Does my friend believe in the equality of members in this House?

Mr. Claude Bachand: Mr. Speaker, first of all, I would like to congratulate my colleague for his command of French. I appreciate the fact that he expresses himself in the language of Molière. I also appreciate the fact that he sends his children to French school. I think that it is very important, especially since year after year, statistics show that the French fact in Canada is completely in decline. I hope that his example will inspire others and that there will be more people like him.

Regarding the proportional representation to which he refers, if I heard my colleague correctly, there are 129,000 constituents in his riding and he says it is normal that we should look at representation so that it is more or less equitable for everyone.

I am returning to my example of Prince Edward Island, with its population of 129,000 people. Despite that, it has four members. So it is not working. What I want to say to my friend is that there is a historical notion as far as Quebec is concerned. In our province, we have one of the founding nations. That is why more and more people are starting to say that there should be an exception for Quebec. It is similar to what we said earlier about Prince Edward Island; that it constitutes an exception. There should be an exception for us as well and we should maintain the proportion of Quebec seats at 25%. The bill currently before us does not say that.

•(1650)

[English]

Mr. David Christopherson (Hamilton Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the opportunity to join in the debate. I will be splitting my time with the member for Vancouver East.

Right from the get-go, as my colleague from Outremont has explained, we have an amended version of the Bloc motion which we can support. I have already had some local media put the question the way one would expect as to how Ontario is going to react and how am I going to react in my own riding. That is a fair question. There is an old saying that all politics are local.

In response, my answer was about Canada. In my mind, while we are dealing specifically with Quebec, for me and many in the NDP caucus, it is about Canada. It is about whether in the future Quebec will continue to be part of Canada. My Canada includes Quebec. I think that is the same for all members of all three federal caucuses, but not the Bloc, which has an express opinion in the opposite direction. That is its right. We struggle to win the hearts and minds of Quebeckers either for the cause of Canada or the cause of sovereignty.

May I just say on that point that while it always causes great grief and heartache on both sides of the equation, when one has the opportunity to travel to some of the other countries in the world and realize how they deal with differences like this, we are truly blessed.

People can say what they want about the Bloc and its purpose, but the fact is the Bloc has been the official opposition, which, before it happened in reality, seemed as though it would be out of a science fiction novel. Notwithstanding its sole purpose, for the most part the Bloc did the job that was expected.

When I look at this issue, I am thinking of the future of Canada. I want to win the debate for the hearts and minds of Quebeckers for Canada, for the Canada side of that debate. Obviously there are a lot of members who believe the same thing and who are prepared to take a lot of heat back home because it was not that long ago when every single member of the House stood in unanimity to declare the province of Quebec a nation within a united Canada.

Mr. Laurie Hawn: Québécois, not Quebec.

Mr. David Christopherson: Québécois, I stand corrected, Mr. Speaker. Fair enough; I never would suggest that I am an expert on these matters, so I will take any correction that needs to be made. It is Québécois.

Business of Supply

The issue that we are hearing now from many on the Quebec side in particular is the Quebec National Assembly. I stand to be corrected again, but my understanding is it was unanimous that it maintain its relative weight, which is the amendment. The Bloc wanted to go to 25. The numbers are not that big, so it was a matter of principle. For us, the 25 gets into the Charlottetown accord, which did not carry, et cetera.

To make the point that the percentage weight that Quebec has now in this place should continue, we believe is the next piece of having declared the Québécois a nation within a united Canada. If this were easy, it would have been done a long time ago. If this were not difficult, Quebec would have signed on to the Constitution. Quebec is part of Canada in every legal sense there is, but we still do not have the signature of a Quebec premier on our Constitution. We want that.

• (1655)

I say with the greatest of respect to my colleagues in the Bloc, I know that they saw success as when they could leave. They felt they could leave when they had their own independent Quebec. That is their goal. My goal is to have the Bloc leave because it lost the debate and Quebec has fully embraced Canada and accepted its full participation and place within our great country.

I say all of this with the greatest respect. I am looking at one of the Bloc members for whom I have the greatest respect. I have travelled with him. I have been with him on committee. I know the kind of work he does. I think he is an outstanding parliamentarian. I hope I am not saying anything that is giving offence because what we have is a difference of ideas, not a lack of respect for one another.

Why has that not already happened? Why has Quebec not realized that we are a wonderful country and it should embrace the rest of us? People should go to Quebec and immerse themselves in its culture and then take a look at how Quebeckers view the world, that lone outpost of the francophone language, culture and many other aspects which is surrounded by the rest of us.

When my daughter looks at a map of Canada I want her to look at the same map that I do. I want my grandchildren and future generations to always look at a map and see Canada in all its beauty. I do not want to see a day and I do not want anything I do here as a parliamentarian for whatever time I am here to lead to the possibility that some day there would be a map of Canada and a great big hole in the middle of it because Quebec has left. As much as the Bloc cherishes that, that is our nightmare scenario.

Therefore, we did take the step of saying that it is a recognized nation within a united Canada. Some of us took some heat back home, but I am not aware of anyone here who has suggested that we reverse that. Therefore, if we meant it when we all stood in our places and cast the most precious thing the public has given us, and that is our vote, and we cast that vote in favour of making that declaration, what does it say if the very next thing we do is rejig the House in such a way that Quebec's relative weighted strength is less than it was when we declared it to be the entity that it is?

It means there would be a movement away from pure representation by population. Okay, but we are already there. We do not have pure representation by population and we will not have

pure rep by pop under the current formula and we will not have pure rep by pop under Bill C-12.

Take a look at P.E.I. My city of Hamilton that I love so much has a little over 500,000 people. We could probably put the population of P.E.I. in Hamilton about three times over. P.E.I. has four guaranteed House seats and four guaranteed Senate seats. Do we want to talk about unfair? There is a 20 minute speech, but that is not the issue. Taking that on and pointing it out why it is not rep by pop and it is a horrible thing gets us nowhere. We have done that because it was one more piece of nation building.

That is what this is about. As my leader, the member for Toronto—Danforth, has said, it is about trying to create the winning conditions for Canada in Quebec. If we meant it when we said that we were going to give Quebeckers the respect of the nationhood title, then we owe them the respect of making sure that their relative weight here is the same as when we made that declaration.

That is not going beyond what we have already done in other parts of the country to recognize regions, communities of interest and other things that do not necessarily fit rep by pop. This is about nation building. It is about wanting to win that struggle between sovereignty and choosing Canada.

This is a good move for Canada and I am prepared to defend this position anywhere in the country.

• (1700)

Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the member's speech reminds me of speeches that were given when we talked about the concept of Quebec as a nation. A lot of these issues came up.

I must admit that I have heard from some constituents regarding their concerns about Quebec and should this situation continue along the line as there is a redistribution of the population and we grow and we take it to its extreme. Do we get ourselves into a position where the arguments become maybe a little more sensitive simply because of harmony within the country and the importance of the francophone element of Canada?

I want the member to muse about what happens as we move beyond tomorrow and look at how Canada evolves, and where we lose reasonable populations in remote areas in Canada. This urbanization and clustering of Canada does change the system. Maybe what we need to be looking at is a reform of our electoral and representation system for Canada as a whole that would move toward things such as rep by pop, if we could open up the Constitution.

Mr. David Christopherson: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his thoughtful remarks. He is right. We have had a lot of these discussions before. I do very much appreciate his giving me the opportunity to talk about proportional representation.

Business of Supply

If we really want to go a long way toward offsetting some of the less than pure aspects of the way that we represent ourselves in this country, many of us believe that proportional representation would allow us to go a long way toward correcting that. Many of us believe that may be one of the keys in terms of what we do with the Senate ultimately. If we really want to get angry, we do not have to go too far down the hall to look at what is going on down there for \$100 million a year. Then we really have something to get angry about with all those appointed people making decisions about the laws of this land and they are not accountable to anybody. That is something to really get enraged about.

I say to the member with the greatest respect, when I go home to my riding I am going to take heat. I have no doubt about that. I have wrestled a bit with that, as I am sure every other member has too, but at the end of the day, Hamiltonians are just as proud of being Canadian as anybody else in this country. This is the piece that is necessary to build that strong country so that all of us, regardless of what province we live in, benefit from that.

I am from Ontario, the biggest province, but not necessarily the strongest anymore. Ontario is not really known on the world stage. I would like to think it is, but it is not. The fact is it is Ontario, Canada. The beauty is that Canada's strength and its respect are things that all Canadians get regardless of what province they are in.

This is all about us inside the boundaries of Canada determining how we go about maintaining this country, building on it and making it even stronger. Quebec is definitely a part of that future and that equation.

Ms. Irene Mathysen (London—Fanshawe, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague for his passionate and compelling statements in regard to Canada, because I do believe we are here by virtue of our passion for this country.

He began to talk about the fact that pure representation by population is not the reality. As part of the Confederation that was crafted in 1867, Prince Edward Island has four House of Commons seats and four Senate seats. I would like to hear his thoughts in regard to northern Ontario, the Northwest Territories, Nunavut, and the impact pure representation by population would have on those areas of Canada that we need to be cognizant about as well.

• (1705)

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member for Hamilton Centre has about a minute left.

Mr. David Christopherson: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for raising that point. That is why I was disappointed that the time is so tight here. The subject is so big.

We have ridings in northern Ontario, northern B.C., Nunavut and the Northwest Territories that are so huge they have populations smaller than the ward I represented when I was on Hamilton city council. That is not pure rep by pop, but just how many hundreds of thousands of square kilometres can we expect one member of Parliament to represent?

There are members here who represent 130,000 people and there are members who represent 35,000 people. That is not fair and it is not pure rep by pop, but it is another part of the ingredient that makes Canada work.

Ms. Libby Davies (Vancouver East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I know that my colleague from Hamilton Centre was just getting warmed up, and he could have gone another 10 minutes or another full spot. I really appreciate the comments he has made.

As our spokesperson in the NDP caucus and the critic for democratic electoral reform, I know the member has put a lot of thought and care into not only this motion and what it really means and what the consequences are but he has put a lot of thought and care into the file overall.

Within our caucus we have really terrific debates about this and many issues, but on this issue we do see it as a very fundamental principle. We are here in this House as individual members of Parliament. We are here because people voted for us. We are here because we got the most amount of votes of all the candidates in each of our ridings.

However, as soon as we become immersed in this system, we begin to realize very quickly that the system is very far from perfect. In fact, there are huge flaws that actually create an environment in our Parliament that is actually not representative.

Having this debate today on the motion that has been brought forward by the Bloc is actually very important because it does provide us with an opportunity to debate this issue about representation in terms of Quebec, its history and its place in our country, but also in terms of other provinces and territories, and as the member just said, communities of interest.

I am member from British Columbia. I represent an urban riding, Vancouver East. There are probably about 120,000-plus people. I am from one of the provinces that is very under-represented. We know that there is a bill that will at some point soon come before us that deals in some way with this issue of representation by population. However, as the member for Hamilton Centre has pointed out, even that bill will not really address some of the fundamental issues that are before us.

I think this is a time to have a thoughtful discussion and to talk about principles of democracy. One of the things that I am really glad about is that we have organizations like Fair Vote Canada that point out to us that Canada is actually now in a minority in that we still use the first past the post system. There are more than 80 countries that use the fair voting system, or what is often called proportional representation or PR.

Fair Vote Canada says:

Fair voting systems have many variations but the core principle is the same: to get as close as possible to treating every voter equally—or in other words, to create true representative democracy.

I think that is a very important principle. It is something that we in our party uphold very strongly. We have been very strong advocates for proportional representation.

Business of Supply

We also believe that there is a principle of representation by population. As we have heard during the debate today, we also recognize very clearly that in this Parliament, regardless of the political party that we are a part of, at least for three of the parties, we are here looking at the ways we build our nation. If we believe in our federal system, we have to look at the realities of the diversity of this country and not only in terms of geography.

We are probably one of the most unique places in the world faced with that kind of geography where we have 80% of our population living within 100 kilometres of the 49th parallel. We have remote communities, vast areas of this country, that still have the right to representation.

We do have this incredible conundrum that on the one hand we uphold the principle of representation by population. We also recognize that there are distinct characteristics of our country, whether it is a small province like Prince Edward Island that is guaranteed, under the Constitution, four seats in this House, or whether it is the specific recognition given to Quebec that has been expressed many times in this House as well as by the court system and certainly by the people of Quebec themselves.

• (1710)

When we put all of these things into the mix, it does produce a very complex situation. However, it is not impossible to move forward in a way that addresses the principles in terms of ensuring that there is increased representation for provinces that are under-represented right now, those being B.C., Alberta and Ontario, while at the same time balancing Quebec's historic place within the federation, which we in our party believe must be respected.

That is why, in approaching this motion today, we did have very thoughtful discussions. Maybe it would have been easy to dash that motion and say that this is just a political game and political optics by a adventurist party, and that it is designed to confuse or entrap. We decided to approach this in a thoughtful way to try and examine the principle that the members of the Bloc are putting forward, and ask ourselves if we support that principle.

Do we believe that ensuring the history and tradition of the reflection regarding the representation from Quebec in the House must be a key principle in however we move forward? We came to the conclusion within our caucus that yes, that is a principle that must be upheld. It is not necessarily mutually exclusive to the other principles that we also believe in, in terms of ensuring that other places and regions in Canada that are under-represented must also be addressed.

It makes for a difficult situation, but I believe that if we approach these things on a basis that is thoughtful and based on strong elements and principles about our country, its diversity, its geography and communities of interest, then we should be able to put our brain power together to configure something that actually represents a balance of those principles.

That is what we bring to the debate on this motion today. We are certainly aware that there is another bill that will be coming before us. The committee that Bill C-12 gets referred to should have a very broad scope to look at that bill and to examine these principles that I

have just been talking about, and that may be articulated in various ways.

The worst thing would be to have a bill that becomes a take-it-or-leave-it bill or an either-or bill. That has happened so many times. It is very interesting to us to know what the political agenda of the Conservative government is because it so often offers these unilateral propositions. It is this or it is nothing. It is yes or no. It is black or white.

When we come to something as complex and as historically weighted in the history of our country, as we move forward to the future, I do not think we can take that approach. In some respects, the motion that is before us today from the Bloc, that we are supporting with the amendment because we think it clarifies that historical position, is the opening round of what that debate will be about. How we approach that will be very important.

We come to this with a sense of good faith. We come to it with a sense of the principles we have outlined about representation by population, about the place of Quebec, about communities of interest, and the notion of reforming our democratic systems so that we actually can get to that place where every voter is equal in the sense of having a system that represents the way they are actually voting. Those things are not impossible if we put our minds to it. We look forward to the ongoing debate, support for the motion as amended, and the bill that will come before us.

• (1715)

Our caucus has a pretty strong notion of what this vision is about and what we want to see within our country within that diversity. We are willing to work very hard to take the steps to achieve it. We hope that other members of this Parliament, regardless of political stripe, are willing to do the same.

Mr. John Weston (West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast—Sea to Sky Country, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I was delighted to hear the remarks of the member for Vancouver East.

We heard her refer to various things which we have in common, such as a common commitment to balance, a common commitment to equality, and a common commitment to a specialness for the province of Quebec.

Quebec is protected in so many ways in our constitutional provisions. Under the bill, it would have a minimum number of seats in the federation and it would continue to have a minimum number of seats in the Supreme Court of Canada. The French language continues to be protected in our federation in so many ways. There are conventions under our system that protect Quebec's representation.

Like me, my colleague comes from a province where the population is growing fast. She, like me, represents a population of 120,000 or more people. Given that, where does she stand on Bill C-12?

Ms. Libby Davies: Mr. Speaker, we are not debating that bill today, but I will answer the member's question in a general way. There are some elements of that bill that are supportable, but I would express the concern that it could become a take-it-or-leave-it proposition.

Business of Supply

That is why our party has put to the government and to other parties the idea of sending that bill to committee to look at its broader scope before it is actually agreed to in principle. That can be done in this House. We have that kind of provision.

Bill C-12 would be a good candidate for that because it does touch on a whole variety of issues that could be examined. If a committee could be given that task, it may be able to find some consensus about how to go about that.

We are not debating that bill specifically today but it is there. We will approach that bill the same way we are approaching this debate, and that is based on the principles of democratic representation and the need for fairness to happen.

Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the member has raised a number of issues that we could talk about in terms of proportional representation or rep by pop.

Diane Marleau, a former colleague of ours, had a bill that concerned northern Ontario. She was making the point that as the population of Canada concentrates and the proportion of northern communities goes down, their representation shrinks, or the riding size becomes so enormous to the point that constituents in those very large ridings would never see their member of Parliament because the member of Parliament could not possibly get around the community.

Obviously, rep by pop in its pristine form is not possible, but maybe we should be looking at how to protect reasonable representation for northern communities, Labrador, P.E.I., and Newfoundland. Maybe then we could deal with the rest of the country in terms of rep by pop.

I wonder what she thinks of that.

● (1720)

Ms. Libby Davies: Mr. Speaker, I certainly would not disagree. The worst thing in the world is to pit one community against another. It becomes the north versus the south or Quebec versus the rest of Canada. That is the worst kind of scenario and it is a scenario that is really easy to fall into.

I am from an urban riding, but I would be the first to reflect on my colleagues who represent places like Skeena—Bulkley Valley, the Northwest Territories or northern Ontario, and to understand the enormous changes in terms of representation, and how they do their work versus how I do my work.

It comes down to the question of whether or not these principles are mutually exclusive to each other. It is a matter of approaching this question by looking at these principles of representation by population, looking at communities of interest, and looking at regions in Canada.

I wish more members would take up proportional representation as a cause. If we ever get to that, it would move us a lot further forward. There are things that we can do to address these questions.

Mr. John Weston (West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast—Sea to Sky Country, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I really find this debate to be what many of us came to the House for. It is striking that the members of at least three of the parties in this House today are

unified in their support for a free and democratic country that is unified and strong.

However, I would say that the underlying bill, Bill C-12, the democratic representation act, which was introduced by the Minister of State for Democratic Reform on April 1, would restore fair representation in the House of Commons, whereas the motion before the House today would result in unfairness and further compromise the core democratic principle of representation by population.

The current constitutional formula for readjusting House seats every 10 years was introduced in 1985. Its effect basically penalizes the faster growing provinces by preventing them from gaining seats in proportion to their population.

As a result, Ontario, Alberta and my home province of British Columbia have become significantly under-represented in our House. In contrast, all other provinces rely on seat guarantees for their seat counts even though their populations do not necessarily justify that number of seats. This means that the faster growing provinces have more populace ridings than slower growing provinces.

Based on 2006 census, ridings in Ontario, Alberta and B.C. had, on average, over 26,000 more constituents than ridings in the slower growing provinces. In the next readjustment of seats, based on projections for the 2011 census, this number is projected to increase to almost 30,000.

The current formula is moving the House further away from the principle of representation by population and the democratic concept of one person, one vote. This is unfair for Canadians in faster growing provinces who may feel that their vote is diluted because their provinces are significantly under-represented in this House.

This is totally consistent with the people's love for Quebec.

[*Translation*]

I like to tell people that I have spent a lot of time in Quebec. I worked for the Quebec government and my three children went to a French immersion school.

[*English*]

I believe that what makes us unique is the special role of Quebec in our Federation, and that would continue to be protected given the constitutional provisions that we have in play. Bill C-12 anticipates that Quebec will continue to have its minimum number of seats. We will continue to have a minimum number of seats in the Supreme Court of Canada that come from Quebec. In the Senate and elsewhere through our Federation, Quebec interests will have unique and special representation.

However, Bill C-12, the democratic representation act, would restore fair representation in the House of Commons. It would correct the unfairness in the current formula by establishing a maximum average riding population per province of 108,000 for the next readjustment of seats. This was approximately the national average riding population at the time of the last general election.

• (1725)

The Deputy Speaker: It being 5:25 p.m., it is my duty to interrupt the proceedings and put forthwith every question necessary to dispose of the business of supply.

The question is on the amendment. Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the amendment?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

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

Some hon. members: Yea.

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

Some hon. members: Nay.

The Deputy Speaker: In my opinion the nays have it.

And five or more members having risen:

The Deputy Speaker: Call in the members.

And the bells having rung:

The Deputy Speaker: Accordingly, the division stands deferred until tomorrow at the end of government orders.

Hon. Gordon O'Connor: Mr. Speaker, I ask that we see the clock at 5:30 p.m.

The Deputy Speaker: Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Deputy Speaker: The House will now proceed to the consideration of private members' business as listed on today's order paper.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Francine Lalonde: Mr. Speaker, it is not yet 5:30 p.m. and we are losing three minutes of speaking time. Will you take three minutes away from the five short minutes I am given?

The Deputy Speaker: The House decided that it is 5:30 p.m. Consequently, we will proceed to the consideration of private members' business.

I can assure you that you will get your full time slot during the debate.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

[*Translation*]

CRIMINAL CODE

The House resumed from March 16 consideration of the motion that Bill C-384, An Act to amend the Criminal Code (right to die with dignity), be read the second time and referred to a committee.

Hon. Mauril Bélanger (Ottawa—Vanier, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, according to the rules, I have 10 minutes to speak about a complex, controversial topic that has numerous moral, legal, economic, social,

Private Members' Business

religious, ethical and other implications. It is impossible, in 10 minutes, to talk about this subject with the depth it deserves.

One of the reasons why this bill should be passed at this stage is that the question of euthanasia, assisted suicide, the end of life and the right to die with dignity is such a complex and delicate question that the Parliament of Canada, where the people send their representatives to discuss serious issues, need to look at it.

A second argument in favour of an affirmative vote is the need to clearly define the terminology. Very different terms are used in speaking about Bill C-384, An Act to amend the Criminal Code (right to die with dignity).

Every one of the 200 to 300 letters I received referred to euthanasia. Almost all these citizens asked me to oppose it and I accepted. I am clearly, categorically and completely opposed to euthanasia.

Yet, we should have a clear understanding of euthanasia. In all end-of-life situations, euthanasia takes place when the person who makes the decision to end the life is not the person dying. No other person, whether they are a health professional or not, has the right to put an end to the life of another person. One of the most famous recent cases was that of Robert Latimer, who ended the life of his daughter Tracy for compassionate reasons. I do not doubt Mr. Latimer's intentions, but his decision was unacceptable and the courts dealt with it as such.

In our society, no person has the right to decide to put an end to the life of another person. I read and reread the bill introduced by the member for La Pointe-de-l'Île. As far as I can see, it does not deal with euthanasia, but with the right to die with dignity. Implicitly and explicitly, this means that this right, if it were established, would be the right of the person who decides to exercise it and of no other person. In addition, this person would have to be competent and coherent.

To illustrate the need for clarity in our vocabulary, which is the second reason for an affirmative vote, we should note that the member for La Pointe-de-l'Île herself used the term euthanasia, in an article published in *Le Devoir* on April 15, when citing the position of the Collège des médecins du Québec. The Canadian Medical Association Journal suggests eliminating the use of the word euthanasia and instead having doctors refer to end-of-life assistance. The different terms used can lead to confusion, which should be avoided.

Here in the House, we talk of dying with dignity. Others talk about assisted suicide or even euthanasia. Maybe we are talking about the same thing, hence the need to define the terms. Let us try to have an enlightened debate, not a debate that leads to confusion. We will not clarify anything by refusing to study it.

For me, euthanasia means that someone else makes the decision to put an end to my life and I do not. I am opposed to that and I will always be opposed. However, if I was suffering from a degenerative, terminal disease and if I still had my faculties, I might like to seek the help of professionals who, on a voluntary basis only, could help me to end my suffering in a dignified and planned way.

Private Members' Business

Is that not something that a number of us would like to choose? I can say that many of my fellow Canadians would.

• (1730)

I would not like to impose my views on others. If someone else in the same situation, suffering, that is, from a degenerative, terminal disease, wanted to prolong his life to the extent that our science allows, I would respect his choice. And I hope that mine would be respected under similar circumstances, that is, that my life would be ended with the help of professionals and that those professionals could not be accused of having broken the law. That is what this is about.

Let us recall the case of Sue Rodriguez, who suffered from a debilitating, terminal illness. She asked that a qualified doctor be permitted to end her life at a time of her choosing. In 1993, let us not forget, the Supreme Court was divided on the question. The Court dismissed Ms. Rodriguez's request five to four. The majority justices based their dismissal of the request on the sanctity of life. The justices who supported the request felt that the right to freely end one's life was paramount. We can see that the debate had already begun in 1993, but the Parliament of Canada continues to avoid it.

Our society already recognizes and respects the will of mentally competent people, under precise circumstances, such as not being kept alive by artificial means or resuscitated if they previously indicated, according to established criteria, that they do not wish to be kept alive.

This is something our institutions take into consideration when they handle end-of-life management, and proper procedures have been put in place. The current approach was not established without a lot of debate, discussion, listening and serious consideration. The same is true of the notion of dying with dignity. We need in-depth debate. We have to consider the legal, economic, social, moral and ethical aspects of the issue.

We should give people an opportunity to come to Parliament—or better yet, the government should go to the people—so that they can express their opinions, share their points of view and add information they deem relevant to the debate. In my opinion, if we shut down the debate without that kind of discussion, we will not be meeting people's expectations or fulfilling our responsibilities as parliamentarians.

Parliament is a place for talking, for discussing, for considering, for learning and then for deciding and legislating. Society is already debating the issue of dying with dignity. I just hope that Canada's Parliament will participate in the debate, will help to structure it, contribute to it and facilitate it so that together, we can make a decision about how to proceed. To date, no government has been willing to launch this important debate. Members have made a few attempts to do so. Will we succeed tomorrow at second reading? I hope so.

I hope so, because I think it is our duty to ensure that Canada's Parliament participates openly, fully and respectfully in debates on important issues such as the one raised in Bill C-384. I therefore urge my colleagues to send this bill to a parliamentary committee so that it can do its work.

• (1735)

[English]

Mr. Bill Siksay (Burnaby—Douglas, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to have the opportunity to speak in this debate on Bill C-384, An Act to amend the Criminal Code (right to die with dignity). I want to thank the member for La Pointe-de-l'Île for bringing it forward.

At the outset, I want to make it clear that I will be voting for this bill and that I support the right to die with dignity. This will come as no surprise to my constituents, since my support for such legislation is something I have made clear on many occasions, both before and after I was first elected.

I have heard from many constituents concerned about this issue and this particular bill. Here is how some expressed their concern. I am quoting from a letter I received: "There are many members of our community who live with disabilities, with terminal illness, with depression, and in various stages of physical or mental decline. They suffer and must not be pressured into feeling an obligation to die because they are burdens to others. They have a right to proper and adequate treatment, pain management, and compassionate end of life care. Euthanasia and assisted suicide, disguised as pain relief and meant to kill, have no place as optional treatment plans."

I can agree with much in that statement but obviously not all. Any legalization of assisted suicide or voluntary euthanasia must not be about pressure. It must not be about making someone feel they are a burden to society or to their family. This is especially true for those with disabilities, those who are depressed or those with terminal illnesses. Treatment, care and pain management must be provided.

The fact remains that pain management does not stop all suffering. Palliative care does not ease all suffering. Despite the best medical treatment and care, some people still have an agonizing death. In those exceptional circumstances, I believe that allowing people the choice to end their own lives should be possible.

It is also true that protocols are now in place to allow this option for many people. Some call it passive or indirect euthanasia, describing the situation where doctors prescribe pain medication that places people in a coma and hastens their death. This is widely practised today in Canada but practised quietly, described by some as underground. It is often not directly acknowledged, which means it is available to some and not to others. The problem of legality also means that it is practised without real oversight. This is unacceptable.

Equally unacceptable to some people at the end of their lives is the practice of being sedated into unconsciousness and then denied food and fluids. Instead, they would prefer a clear personal choice for a dignified death. Like any piece of legislation, the bill before us today may not be perfect, but it is an important issue to debate and an important proposal to study. It is high time that it was on the legislative agenda of Parliament.

Sue Rodriguez, who in the early 1990s was living with ALS, famously asked the question, whose body is it, when she petitioned the Supreme Court for a physician-assisted suicide. She was ultimately denied in a close five-to-four decision. However, in February 1994, she did die at a time of her own choosing with the help of a physician. A police investigation resulted, but charges were never laid.

I remember that time very acutely because at the time I worked for the former MP for Burnaby—Douglas, Svend Robinson. Svend, everyone will recall, worked for years with Sue Rodriguez on the issue of physician-assisted suicide and was with her when she died. In my opinion, many acts of love and bravery were performed the day Sue died, by Sue, by Svend and by the anonymous doctor who assisted her. I was never prouder of Svend than when, at a press conference following Sue's death, he was asked if the highest duty of an MP should not be upholding the law and he responded that the highest duty of a member of Parliament is love.

I answered hundreds of phone calls in Svend's office after Sue's deaths, hundreds of moving, sometimes desperate, sometimes angry calls, but one in particular from a family investigated by the police for taking seriously a terminally ill loved one's questions about assisted suicide and euthanasia will stay with me forever. Just for discussing these issues in their family member's hospital room, they were reported to the police, who then visited them at their home. For some people the conversation is possible and results in the assistance they seek. For others, the conversation is not possible or results in other unacceptable consequences.

Palliative care and pain management are indeed issues related to this topic. We need to do more to ensure excellent palliative care is available to all. We need to ensure there is research and training in pain management. We know that when patients can be assured about those issues, most are relieved to know they will not suffer unduly. For many, that is all the insurance they need.

However, not all who have terminal diseases are guaranteed that they will not suffer terribly at the end of their lives and some of those people request assistance in dying.

Many opponents of dying with dignity note that the end of a life can be a time of reconciliation, when a strong sense of inner peace can be experienced, and there is no doubt about that, but it is also true that this is not always possible for every dying person. For some, there is no peace or reconciliation possible when they are subjected to terrible agony without the possibility of relief. In those cases, death may offer the only possibility of peace and reconciliation.

• (1740)

I believe it is possible to craft a law that works and provides appropriate safeguards. This has happened in other jurisdictions, in Belgium, the Netherlands, Luxembourg, Switzerland, and the states of Oregon and Washington.

Many people bring a theological perspective to this issue. Theologian Daniel Maguire has written extensively on the issue and he has said, "If you start out with the physicalist presumption, that only one's organic system can determine death in a way that is natural to humans, the discussion is stopped in its tracks. If however,

Private Members' Business

you grant that it is natural for humans to deliberate about alternative possibilities and to pursue that course which commends itself to their reason, then death by choice can be discussed. It could in fact be seen as quite natural to humans whose distinctive dignity is their capacity for choice".

He goes on to ask the question, "Why should disease, not the patient, have all the say?"

The legal perspective for allowing the right to die is also important to note. Supreme Court Justice Peter Cory's dissenting opinion in the 1993 Sue Rodriguez case should be remembered in this debate. He said:

The life of an individual must include dying. Dying is the final act in the drama of life. If, as I believe, dying is an integral part of living, then as a part of life it is entitled to the constitutional protection provided by s. 7. It follows that the right to die with dignity should be as well protected as any other aspect of the right to life. State prohibitions that would force a dreadful, painful death on a rational but incapacitated terminally ill patient are an affront to human dignity.

The bill before us is not about making the decision for others. It is about ensuring people who are dying have the ability to make choices about their own life and can exercise those choices with informed consent.

This bill talks about adult decision-makers who are lucid, those who are in physical or mental pain that cannot be relieved or those suffering from a terminal illness, those who have made the request twice, 10 days apart, freely and with full information from their doctor.

The bill provides that the medical diagnosis must be reviewed by an impartial medical practitioner with no personal interest in the death of the person. The bill gives the power to the patient to revoke the request at any time.

These are the reasons I am glad Parliament is finally debating this issue. I will be voting for this bill, and I hope it will proceed to committee where it can be studied in detail, where witnesses can be heard on its provisions and where improvements can be made as appropriate.

• (1745)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Nicole Demers (Laval, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I am very proud to rise today to speak to the bill introduced by my colleague from La Pointe-de-l'Île. I do so, because I know this member very well. I know that she is a sensible woman, a courageous woman, and above all, a woman with incredible intellectual integrity.

I do not know anything about medication. I am not a doctor. I have no legal knowledge about anything addressed in this bill. But I do have a lot of life experience, and I hope to be the voice of reasoning on this bill this evening.

I have a great deal of life experience, and have found myself in many different situations. That is why today I am perhaps more willing to pass this bill so that we can further discuss it. I say this because I realize that, in my circles, it is a difficult subject to discuss. I think it is difficult to talk about death in Quebec. It is a difficult matter to bring up. We are afraid of death. We fear death as we fear life. We are afraid of death because it is final, scary and we do not know what will happen afterwards. We are afraid of the unknown.

Private Members' Business

I have watched loved ones die. People I loved very much did not ask me to help them die because they were ready to die; they asked me to just listen to them talk about death.

In the early 1980s, I volunteered for Sésame, an organization that supported people living with AIDS. At that time, most people suffering from AIDS were terminally ill. They did not have the benefit of therapies to help them live longer with the virus without being so sick.

I remember one young man whom I was assisting. During his last days in hospital, he asked me to take him in my arms and to listen to him. Everyone who visited him in the hospital told him that it would be all right, that he would get better, not to worry and that everything would work out. It was not true. It was a lie. They tried to sustain the illusion. He was tired. He was ready to die but he wanted to talk about it openly. He died after telling me that he was ready to die and that he wanted to die, and after I had told him that it was all right and that I accepted that he was ready to die and that he wanted to die. I found it to be a moment of great tenderness and beauty because we had faced reality.

And I think that we are asking for that as well in this bill. Medicine has evolved to the point where people are living to 110, 112 or 115. I tip my hat to those who live to that age and are healthy. However, there are seniors in assisted-living homes who are not able to take care of themselves and who suffer constantly because of cancer or a degenerative disease. We keep them here and help them survive—not live, survive—and we do not give them the chance to choose. I think that this is criminal in a way. It is also a bit sadistic to allow people to suffer. If we know that a person has written a living will and that during their life that person decided they want to die when they are no longer able to stand the pain, I think that we should respect that right.

My colleague's bill establishes very specific guidelines to ensure that no one can go beyond that wish, so that no one, for example, could help a child die, since they would not understand. Nor could you help someone with intellectual disabilities die.

● (1750)

The person who chooses to do this must write their intentions twice in 15 days. It provides a moment to reflect, to take a step back and ask if it is really what they want. This moment ensures that the person makes an informed choice while lucid.

Contrary to what I have read in a number of emails that I have received, I do not believe that this bill will undermine peoples' lives. I do not believe that. I sincerely believe that this bill needs to be passed and studied in committee. It must be passed with all its clauses because they will rule out any mistakes. We cannot go beyond these guidelines.

A few years ago, I saw my grandmother die in the hospital at age 92. She worked hard her whole life. She was an exceptional woman. The year before she was admitted to hospital, she had redone her entire hardwood floor. She sanded and stained it by hand, by herself. She was a strong woman, even at 92.

When she was in the hospital and I went to see her, she told me she was tired. I asked the doctors and nurses how she was doing, how her health was, how she was feeling and what care they were

giving her. They replied that she was receiving automatic injections of morphine to relieve her pain. I told myself that since they were giving her morphine, it meant that she was going to die soon. When someone is given morphine, their entire system shuts down. I was told that it was better for her this way.

Doctors and nurses know what they are doing. They know and they do this in certain circumstances in which they are not authorized to do it, but they know that if they do not, the individual will suffer needlessly for several months. These things happen. I think doctors would also be relieved to finally have legislation that allows them to end people's suffering, without facing any accusations.

This bill was drafted by an individual who reflected very carefully on the matter, who met with people and experts from everywhere to talk about and debate the issue, and who helped establish an organization that promotes this issue. I am sure that when she drafted the bill, she did not know that she herself would develop cancer, which she battled so courageously.

As long as one has a life to live and wants to live it, life should go on. However, when an individual can no longer endure the pain they are suffering, I want them to have choices. They should be able to say they want to die with dignity and ask for help in that regard.

● (1755)

[English]

Mr. Tim Uppal (Edmonton—Sherwood Park, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to participate in today's debate of Bill C-384. The bill proposes to amend the Criminal Code to legalize euthanasia and assisted suicide.

This subject is a very difficult and sensitive one. It touches on the matter of medical ethics and the criminal law. The bill proposes that doctors be authorized to intentionally and actively terminate the life of a patient on his or her request. Under the current criminal law, such an act constitutes murder, or if the act itself, which causes death, is carried out by the patient himself or herself, it constitutes assisted suicide.

I do not support the general principle behind the bill. I do not believe doctors should be given the power to end a human life in this way. Bill C-384 offers death as a solution to pain and suffering. I do not believe that this is the right solution for Canadians.

People with serious but non-life threatening illnesses should be offered treatment and support. So too should people with severe mental pain. People with terminal illness should be offered good palliative care. As a society, we must support quality health care services for all Canadians, including care for the dying.

Private Members' Business

I fully appreciate how this issue is the subject of great divergent views in our society. Contrary to how some commentators may suggest, the various polls that have been conducted on this issue in Canada have not demonstrated a clear consensus for reforms along the lines of what is proposed in Bill C-384.

The polling questions have generally focused on terminally ill patients. Bill C-384 does not focus merely on persons who suffer from a terminal illness. The scope of the bill is extremely broad. It would allow people who are not in the process of dying to ask a doctor to end their life. It includes people who want to commit suicide due to illness.

Furthermore, the breadth of the proposed amendments is not limited to those who suffer from severe physical illness but also mental illness. On this point, serious concerns have been expressed by several hon. members on how the bill includes a number of vague terms that have not been defined, terms such as severe physical or mental pain, or while appearing to be lucid but left undefined.

I believe doctors would not be provided clear guidance with these proposals. I also believe it would have huge implications for the provisions of medical services, not to mention potentially serious conflict with medical ethical standards.

As another hon. member mentioned earlier in the second reading debate of the bill, the Canadian Medical Association has stated that it does not support euthanasia and assisted suicide. It clearly urges its members to uphold the principles of palliative care. The Canadian Medical Association's policy on this issue is unequivocal: Canadian physicians do not participate in euthanasia or assisted suicide. Furthermore it has specifically stated that it does not support Bill C-384.

We have also heard how the bill does not provide sufficient safeguards to protect against potential abuses and ensure proper reporting. Therefore, the use of vague terms, some of which I have just mentioned, along with the fact that the reporting requirement consists of providing a copy of the diagnosis to the coroner after the fact raises a concern that people's lives could be terminated without their true and informed consent or while they are in a vulnerable state.

Since the introduction of the bill, a number of petitions from Canadians have been forwarded to the House. Those petitions, numbering in the hundreds, possibly thousands, have urged the House of Commons to oppose the bill.

● (1800)

I have already mentioned that I cannot support the general principle behind this bill. I believe that the overall thrust of the present debate at second reading has pointed to serious concerns with this bill, both with the general scope of it and in terms of the many flaws contained in it. As a result of these broad concerns, I think it would be premature for the House to refer this issue to a committee for further study.

Mr. Michael Savage (Dartmouth—Cole Harbour, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to have the opportunity to speak to this bill this evening. It is a bill whose progress I have followed with particular attention and the opportunity to speak tonight is one that I am very appreciative to have.

I want to say at the outset that I will not be voting for this bill. I do not support this bill and I do not support its intent. I do, however, want to commend the member, who has proposed this bill and who has led this fight, for her diligent work on this file, her sincere and informed opinion and understanding of this issue, but I believe it is one of those issues where people who have equal interests can have different points of view. It is a sensitive issue and it may well be an issue that needs a more fulsome debate in this country.

I want to speak to this bill from two points of view. I want to speak to it from a personal point of view. Like most members of the House, I have had experience with people who have died with dignity. It has had a profound effect on my life and the lives of my family and it has certainly had a profound effect on how I view this bill. I want to talk personally in a way that I would not normally about my own situation. I want to talk about my parents.

My parents both had cancer. I do not believe that cancer beat them. I think they beat cancer even though cancer took their lives. My father was diagnosed with inoperable cancer in July 2001. The prognosis was very bleak but he started an aggressive treatment of chemo. He had chemo treatments 24 hours a day and it worked. My father entered a remission period and had a remarkable period of remission in his life. While on remission, he visited Africa and Russia. He did the social development work that mattered very much to him. We felt as close to my father in that period as we ever did.

In November 2002 the cancer returned, and a few weeks later my mother was diagnosed with bowel cancer, one week before Christmas. I am one of seven children. My two sisters became full-time caregivers for my parents from Christmas 2002 onward. By mid-January, my mother was in palliative care, although she was at home, and our family was honoured to care for her. We cared for her in her home. On March 31, 2003, she passed away. Three days after her funeral, my dad was told that his chemo treatments were no longer advised and he came off chemo and entered palliative care as well. He passed away on May 13, six weeks to the day after my mother.

I tell this story because my parents died at home, in peace and sure that they were headed to a better place. We knew as their children that they were ready to leave this world. They both fought cancer with great courage and neither one of them were people to give up without a fight. They felt entirely in control, not only at the end of their life but in control of their death.

It is hard for anybody who has seen people they love die, like so many have, and not be impacted by that. I want to speak to how that impacts my view on this bill because my parents both made a decision. I can recall the conversation with my father when he said that he would no longer be eating. He was at home and he had decided that he would no longer eat. He knew he was ready to go. I do not think he ever actually said to us that he was going to die in two or three days but he was in control of that part of his life and he knew it was time. Likewise, my mother made those same decisions. The opportunity for us as family to be with them in those circumstances was an opportunity I cherished.

Private Members' Business

When I think about people my age with parents, it seems that one of two things happens. They either die in circumstances quicker than we would like or sometimes they take longer in their passing than they would probably like for the sake of their own family.

However, I do not believe that we needed this legislation to allow my parents to have control of their death. To go to a place that they were ready to go to was a decision that they made, were comfortable making and were able to make under the laws that existed and under what they considered to be the God that they were prepared to join.

• (1805)

I also do not like this bill because a number of people I represent in my capacity as the critic for human resources, particularly in the disability community, are very concerned about this bill. They do not know exactly where it will lead. At the very least, they think there should be a more serious debate about this before final decisions are made. It should be something that is consulted widely and taking into account the various levels of palliative care.

I do not think anybody here would say that our palliative care system is as strong as it should be. My parents went through this process in Nova Scotia. My father, as a medical doctor, had pioneered some of the palliative care back in the 1970s. He was at the bedside of many people when they passed away and was a big believer in palliative care. When he passed away we were very fortunate in that we are a reasonably well off family. We are not rich but we are comfortable. There are seven kids. Every day, every one of us would go and talk to our mom and dad and be with them when they needed help. We had a prayer session three times a day with a great gospel from the Benedictine monks called the *The Glenstal Book of Prayer: A Benedictine Prayer Book*.

We took great comfort from all of those things, but the palliative care system is not strong enough. Many people in Nova Scotia and in the rest of Canada simply do not have access to palliative care or even, in some cases, home care that we need to have. That is where I believe our efforts should be.

Let us look at what other nations are doing with the issue of euthanasia. Let us consider what supports we have for people in the community. The experience I had with my parents led me to believe that if there is one thing that we should all strive to have in Canada, and that we as parliamentarians should fight for, it is the opportunity for people to die at home if they wished to. Most people cannot afford that because its costs money to have night nurses and day nurses.

For us, because there were seven children and because we had parents who made it easy, we were able and in fact honoured to provide that service to our parents, perhaps as some small, tangible appreciation for all they had done for us.

Let us focus on palliative care and home care. Let us provide the supports that people need in their time of need. Let us be very mindful of people with disabilities, particularly people who are not always able to make decisions on their own and who rely upon others for support, guidance and the everyday aspects of their lives.

I do not support this bill. I truly do commend the member and I commend all people who have expressed their views on this debate. My view comes from my personal experience and my concern for

people who are concerned that this bill might impact negatively upon their lives. For those reasons, I cannot support this bill.

Mr. Jim Maloway (Elmwood—Transcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise today to speak to this bill.

Having listened to the presentation by the member for Dartmouth—Cole Harbour, I find that my situation is remarkably similar to his.

Up to two or three years ago, I, too, like other members here, would have advocated for this type of bill thinking that it was a positive solution, but after my experience, which almost mirrors that of the previous member, of having had two parents who both had cancer at the same time, I came to the conclusion that this was not the way to proceed.

I do commend the member for bringing the bill forward because it is important to advance the debate. It is important that pain management issues and palliative care be advanced as quickly as possible.

We were lucky enough in the city of Winnipeg to have a fairly good system of palliative care, so we were able to take advantage of that in both of my parent's cases. While palliative care is well served in the Winnipeg region, I am mindful that half of the population lives outside of Winnipeg and I would expect that palliative care facilities are not available in a lot of those areas. We have a long way to go toward improving our palliative care centre. I am told that the situation in the rest of the country is not as good as that in Winnipeg. I am not sure whether it was the member for Windsor—Tecumseh but I know other members talked about how only 20% of the population in Canada is covered for palliative care in hospices and another 15% of the country is only partially covered.

In terms of jurisdictions, the member for Windsor—Tecumseh made an excellent presentation. He seemed to have the same sort of view as me, that while this was a good place to start the discussion, procedures are not yet in place to proceed with a bill such as this. He talked about other jurisdictions in the world where this is the practice. I have been aware of the situation in Holland for a number of years but I was not aware of the situation in Washington state or in Oregon. My colleague certainly talked about those in great detail. He explained that in the 12 years that the state of Oregon has had such legislation, 93 people were candidates but only 50 actually took their own lives. He indicated that the law was much newer in Washington state so there were smaller numbers to look at.

My colleague said that in Holland, for example, it was basically the frail and the elderly who were using this method and that the minister in charge of the legislation in Holland had actually changed her mind on the issue. This is a minister in the Government of Holland where such a practice is legal, who has inside information about how the system works in Holland, and she has changed her mind on the subject.

This is essentially a work in progress.

Private Members' Business

●(1810)

I am concerned about the point made by some members that if we were to adopt this measure, it would cut back the impetus to improve palliative care. As long as assisted suicide is illegal, the pressure will still be on governments and jurisdictions to develop palliative care as quickly as possible. If we passed legislation like this bill, then the pressure would be off.

The other major concern we have is people not feeling that they are free to make their own decisions. There will always be cases where mistakes are made. We do not want to develop a situation as I believe exists or may have existed in Holland, where it becomes a place for people from other countries to go to take advantage of the situation. That would develop the whole issue into an industry, almost a business venture. I do not think we want that kind of situation to develop.

Certainly disabled groups in the country have been very clear for many years that they think this is the thin edge of the wedge. They are, and I think rightly so, very concerned about this.

I served in the provincial legislature for 23 years. I do not think anybody, in 23 years, ever phoned my office or asked me to support legislation of this type. This is something we have to take a much more in-depth look at.

Another area that we have looked at is the whole issue of pain management. As the member for Windsor—Tecumseh mentioned, the doctors need more training. There needs to be more training done in the area of pain management. With proper pain management, people can manage a disease much more effectively than they can without proper pain management.

We do not need to have situations where there are people with a terminal disease and we do not have proper hospices and palliative care or proper pain management and people feel there is no way out and it would be so much easier for them to succumb to pressures, perceived or otherwise. The last thing we want is for people to feel they do not want to be a burden on their family any more and do not want to deal with pressure that they think is there. Maybe the pressure is not there, but they imagine it is. We should be encouraging people to fight as hard as possible to stay alive, with the proper pain management systems and proper encouragement. To me, it is a negative to be entertaining the idea that assisted suicide is an option.

I know other colleagues of mine probably would like to speak. The member for Edmonton—Strathcona and I have spoken about this issue before.

It is a very difficult issue for people, but it is something we all will have to face at some time. I think the time has come for us to rely on medical decisions and pain management issues and proper hospice care. That is the way we should look at it. That is the way we should move forward to develop a comprehensive palliative care system in this country so that we give people more options so that they, in their own minds, do not view assisted suicide as the only option available and choose that option when they perhaps should not be choosing that option.

●(1815)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): Resuming debate. The hon. member for Timmins—James Bay will have three minutes.

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am very proud to speak to this bill. I would say at the outset that I think the House of Commons is the place for this debate. I have received thousands of letters from my constituents who are deeply concerned about this issue.

This is a discussion that is worth having because the issue of suffering, the issue of death is perhaps one of the most profound issues we can deal with as a society. It touches each of us. Each of us is brought into the final moments of death at a level of intimacy and concern we never would have felt possible.

I spent much of the last three weeks with my father at the palliative care centre in Scarborough General Hospital. I want to say on the record that the palliative care that exists in this country is second to none. Two years ago I spent time with my brother-in-law as he lay dying at Perram House in Toronto. The experience I had there had a profound impact on me and my whole family and our understanding of this.

The question before us today is what we should be doing as a society. It is an issue that cuts to the very essence of this House of Commons. We need to bring forth the option of saying we have to maintain the ability of Canada's health care system to manage pain for people in palliative care so that they can go through that final journey.

It is possible to do it without taking the option of saying we have to go the assisted suicide route. I understand why people might believe that is an option, but I do not believe it is the option we should be taking as a society. To take that position and for us to vote on this in the House of Commons means more than making a statement. We have to provide the resources necessary so that our medical systems and our families have the support they need. Otherwise we will be leaving the sick, the suffering and the dying in a situation in which they should not be left.

It is possible to have good pain management. It is possible to treat people with dignity right through the final moments. However, that has to be a decision we make as a society and a commitment we make to each other that we will be there as a society, we will be there with the medical system, we will be there as family and we will be there as a community.

This debate has reminded us of the need to make that commitment. I hope this House of Commons will make that commitment when the time comes to vote.

●(1820)

[*Translation*]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): The hon. member for La Pointe-de-l'Île has a five-minute right of reply.

Ms. Francine Lalonde (La Pointe-de-l'Île, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I would like to start by thanking all my colleagues who took part in the debate, but I want to say that palliative care and my bill on the right to die with dignity are not mutually exclusive, but complementary.

Adjournment Proceedings

I wrote something in 2005, before I learned I had cancer. I wrote this, and I still believe wholeheartedly in it:

Any lucid person facing a very difficult and painful end of life, which they consider degrading, an unfitting end to the life they have led, inconsistent with their condition as a free person, has to be able to decide how they wish to die, including if they want to be aided in that objective.

It is the individual who must choose. It is not society that must choose for the individual. The individual must have the freedom to choose at the end of their life.

The experience of doctors who look after individuals who have been allowed to be helped to die in countries that have passed legislation in this regard is enlightening. One might infer that, knowing that they will be able to get help to die with dignity when they reach the point where their life has definitely become unbearable, it will be easier for people to live fully a painful end of life or a life of extreme limitations because they feel imprisoned in their bodies. As Félix Leclerc reminded us, death is full of life.

I could quote Justice Cory, who also says that section 7 of the charter gives Canadians the constitutional right to life, liberty and security of the person. This provision emphasizes the dignity inherent in human existence. Death is an integral part of life and as such is therefore entitled to the constitutional protection provided by section 7. A person should have the right to choose their own death.

I understand why my colleague's parents made the choice they did. His father was a doctor. It was their choice. Nonetheless, sometimes the end of life comes after a period of extreme suffering and at a time when people can decide they no longer can tolerate their life, their dependence on others and their unending suffering. I have sent hon. members a text a constituent sent me on what it is to suffer and I invite hon. members to read it. People can decide their limits and ask for assistance to die and not to live for another month or two just to suffer more and become more emaciated.

I can tell you that when I wrote that, I did not know what unbearable pain was. Now I do and I have learned that medicine, with all its progress, can only provide help with side effects such as hallucinations or other terrible effects to the body. We have to have the right to choose. I am speaking on behalf of the vulnerable. They are the ones who need this type of legislation the most because only this type of legislation will allow them to be the people they choose to be. There are currently many places where people can die and with all the instruments available to doctors, it is possible to help people die without them having to ask.

• (1825)

A person's right to choose is what is at the heart of this bill. I am asking hon. members to vote in favour of this bill in order that it may be referred to a committee. Then members of the committee could examine what seems—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): It being 6:28 p.m., the time provided for debate has expired.

The question is on the motion. Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): All those in favour will please say yea.

Some hon. members: Yea.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): All those opposed will please say nay.

Some hon. members: Nay.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): In my opinion, the nays have it.

And five or more members having risen:

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): Pursuant to Standing Order 93, a recorded division stands deferred until Wednesday, April 21, 2010, immediately before the time provided for private members' business.

ADJOURNMENT PROCEEDINGS

A motion to adjourn the House under Standing Order 38 deemed to have been moved.

[*English*]

STATUS OF WOMEN

Hon. Anita Neville (Winnipeg South Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to have the opportunity to be in the House to follow up on a question that I asked the minister on Wednesday, March 17.

Members will recall that I asked about the government's action plan as it related to the Status of Women. We had been told many times over the years that the former minister of state for Status of Women had been developing an action plan for Canadian women. She told us several times that it would be finished soon and it would be forthcoming.

In March we learned, in fact, that the action plan was what she called her three pillars: increasing women's economic security and prosperity, ending violence against women and enhancing women's leadership in democratic participation. I really question the validity and the viability of a plan that was done without consultation.

I particularly question the viability of the plan. In her last appearance before the Standing Committee on Status of Women, I asked the minister how she determined the funding for the various groups in the community that receive funding under either the community program or the partnership program. She told me that the staff of the Status of Women reviewed applications and made recommendations, but that she ultimately had the final say, yea or nay, as to whether a group received funding. To me, that does not speak of an action plan when one can make decisions based on ideological preconceptions in order to determine whether an organization gets funding.

We know that when she talked about violence against women, one of her colleagues said that the answer to this was to put more people in jail. I do not know how that constitutes an action plan.

Adjournment Proceedings

I do not know how it constitutes an action plan when she recommends we do away with the long gun registry when the Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police say that the gun registry has 11,000 hits a day. We know that a disproportionate number of them deal with domestic violence issues.

The restructuring of the Status of Women ended the funding for advocacy and research. We know long-standing grant recipients are no longer funded, such as the Womanspace Resource Centre in Lethbridge, which helped women who needed help with tax returns, securing housing and becoming independent. It lost its funding after 25 years. The phones were disconnected and the doors closed.

We know the YWCA in Montreal did not get funding. We know organizations in Quebec and the Equal Pay Coalition had their funding denied because they chose to speak out against pay equity. We know there has been no advocacy by the previous minister or anyone on that side on behalf of women.

We know there has been no research. We know the Aboriginal Healing Foundation, which gave money to support women who had been abused, had its money withdrawn. The minister cited the economic action plan as a plan for women. We know there were very few benefits to women under the economic action plan.

It is incumbent upon the government to file a real action plan for women.

• (1830)

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher (Parliamentary Secretary for Status of Women, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague for her interest and participation in this issue. As the member knows, women and girls represent more than half of our population in Canada. Women play an important role in Canada; not only do they drive the Canadian economy, but they also significantly contribute to our society.

However, they still face barriers and obstacles every day. Aboriginal women are the most vulnerable women in our society, and are victimized more than any other group. Like all Canadians, aboriginal women want to feel safe in their homes and their communities. That is why our government has demonstrated unprecedented support and respect for aboriginal women.

In the most recent budget, we allocated \$10 million to protect women by cracking down on crime and addressing unresolved cases of murdered and missing aboriginal women.

We have implemented and continue to introduce new criminal bills to ensure that women are protected from rapists and murderers.

We are protecting children against sexual predators, and we are protecting vulnerable women against sexual slavery.

We will continue to work so that all women can feel safe in their homes and in their communities.

We have also made progress toward ensuring equal treatment for women in the workplace.

Under our government, more women than ever are working in the federal public service.

Women make up more than half of the public service, and 43% of the deputy ministers running the public service are women.

Women are making progress. In the past, they were denied access to executive positions in companies across Canada.

We can be proud of these achievements. As a woman and a Conservative Party member, I am proud of this, and I am very happy to have the opportunity to champion these issues. But we still have a lot to do.

Our government is determined to work with women to continue moving forward.

I would ask my honourable colleague to work with us, to transcend party lines, because women's issues should not be exploited or used for political gain. Together, we can keep moving forward on women's issues.

• (1835)

[*English*]

Hon. Anita Neville: Mr. Speaker, I do not know whether the hon. member opposite she feels the embarrassment I think we feel over here, that she had to stand and read that kind of speech.

She has sat in the committee. She has heard the many issues and challenges that women face. She knows women cannot go to work or go to school because there is no early learning and child care. There is no literacy program. There is no court challenges program, and the list goes on.

We on this side have been calling for a national investigation into the murdered and missing aboriginal women for about nine months now. We have had a tepid response from the government, promises and no action. We are more than willing and happy to work co-operatively with the government if it shows a real commitment to the issues of women and not use women for simply political purposes and political gain.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: Mr. Speaker, no, I am not embarrassed to be standing up for women, I am not embarrassed about what we have done for women, and I am not embarrassed to be taking action for women.

We see things differently, that is for sure, but nobody in this House, particularly not the women, can say that we have not made progress.

Who introduced changes to employment insurance benefits for self-employed workers, most of whom are women? Our government came up with that.

I do not need to read my female colleagues' little pink book, which is full of empty Liberal promises. Over the past four years, Status of Women Canada's budget has been between \$30 million and \$35 million. That is more than Status of Women Canada ever had in the past.

The Liberals are not in a position to teach me anything.

Adjournment Proceedings

[English]

ENVIRONMENT

Ms. Linda Duncan (Edmonton—Strathcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I rise in the House today to follow up on a question that I earlier put on March 2, which happened to be the United Nations World Water Day. That question was put to the government at large for a specific reason. Many of the ministers in the government share responsibility for the protection of our water resources.

In his wisdom, the Minister of the Environment responded, and I look forward to hearing the response to my question today.

Perhaps it is appropriate that the matter is again being raised just two days before the 40th Earth Day. Therefore, there is a two day notice to the ministers that they can still yet table the long awaited federal initiatives on water, which they have been promising for quite some time.

One of those is the aboriginal safe drinking water law, which was promised in the 2009 throne speech, yet to be presented to the House as far as I am aware.

The second would be a law to ban bulk water exports, a matter of great concern. For a number of years now, Canadians across the country have expressed this concern.

The third one is for the federal government to finally assert its federal powers to address serious climate impacts and pollution threats to Canadian waters.

I will address most of my comments today to the matter of aboriginal safe drinking water. The Minister of the Environment, for example, may wonder why he would speak to that, he is not the Minister of Indian Affairs. Hear me out and I will explain why it is a matter of concern, not only to the Minister of the Environment, but also to the Minister of Natural Resources, in addition to the Minister of Indian Affairs.

The need for a law to protect aboriginal safe drinking water has been identified not once, not twice, but at least three times by federal authorities. In 2005 the audit by the Commissioner for Environment and Sustainable Development issued a strong recommendation for the federal government to take action on aboriginal safe drinking water. She stated in that report:

When it comes to the safety of drinking water, residents of First Nation communities do not benefit from a level of protection comparable to that of people who live off reserves. This is partly because there are no laws and regulations governing the provision of drinking water to First Nation communities, unlike other Canadian communities. INAC and Health Canada attempt to ensure safe drinking water in First Nation communities...This approach does not cover all the elements that would be found in a regulatory regime for drinking water, and it is not implemented consistently.

The Commissioner for Environment and Sustainable Development went on to recommend five areas where action should be taken by the federal government. One specifically was that laws and regulation should be enacted to govern the provision of drinking water for these communities and that technical assistance be provided to first nations.

The second report was by the Senate Committee on Aboriginal Affairs. I will quote from the recommendation from that committee. It states:

Ironically, a number of the issues surrounding drinking water quality on-reserve have been the result of economic development and other activities that have polluted the source water surrounding First Nations communities.

That gives a hint to the government as to why I would say that both the Minister of the Environment and Minister of Natural Resources have a responsibility as well to move in to take action to protect aboriginal safe drinking water. The very reasons why first nations are leery of moving expeditiously on a federal law is because the intent would be to hand over liability to them. They are saying that they need the resources and the capacity.

What action is the government taking in all of these to protect Canadian water?

● (1840)

Mr. Mark Warawa (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of the Environment, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the fact is that we have a comprehensive action plan for clean water. It includes investments in science and in monitoring our water resources. It provides resources to clean up the contaminated lakes and rivers. It is working with the provinces and territories to develop new regulations on waste water. It invests in clean water for aboriginal communities.

Through the infrastructure stimulus fund, we announced \$740 million for 1,100 waste water projects across Canada. We have also made the gas tax permanent and doubled it to \$2 billion per year. In total, the Government of Canada, under the leadership of the Prime Minister, has spent or committed \$3.25 billion for waste water and water infrastructure.

We are taking the lead in proposing new regulations for municipal, community, federal and other waste water systems. This includes standards for national waste water effluent quality and provides regulatory clarity for rules on reporting for more than 3,700 Canadian facilities. On March 19, the Minister of the Environment announced publication of the proposed waste water systems effluent regulations in the *Canada Gazette*, beginning the formal 60-day comment period. Hopefully, the member will comment.

The government is also working with the United States to protect the Great Lakes through the binational Great Lakes water quality agreement. Over the next year, representatives from the Canadian and United States governments are meeting to amend this important environmental agreement. Much has changed since the agreement was last updated in 1987 and we must keep up with the times.

Furthermore, budget 2010 continues funding for the Great Lakes action plan, cleaning up the most severely contaminated and degraded areas of the Great Lakes. We are spending \$50 million per year on the Great Lakes and almost \$15 million per year to clean up the St. Lawrence River.

Under the action plan for clean water, the Lake Winnipeg basin initiative has received funding for \$18 million over two years to promote the long-term sustainability of the lake. The initiative provides a new model for how the Government of Canada can support integrated basin-wise watershed management elsewhere in Canada. In addition to the millions of dollars to support stewardship projects, we are investing millions more to implement a comprehensive science program for Lake Winnipeg using Canada's federal scientific expertise.

As well, the Government of Canada is taking action to address water pollution issues in Lake Simcoe. We are investing \$30 million over five years to help reduce the amount of phosphorous getting into streams and rivers feeding the lake, and to help restore fish and wildlife populations.

The government is committed to improving the health and quality of life for people in first nations communities, providing better water and waste water services for their residents. Budget 2010 extends the first nations water and watershed action plan for another two years, bringing the four-year total to \$660 million over four years. The member needs to do more than speak on action. She needs to support the good environmental action of this government.

• (1845)

Ms. Linda Duncan: Mr. Speaker, I have done more than just talk. I have actually published a book on aboriginal safe drinking water and I look forward to providing a copy to as many of the government members as I can. However, my first priority is to the first nations who are actually trying to take action on having safe drinking water laws.

I listened with great interest to what the government is doing, but it is still not moving on what it promised to do a year ago in the

Adjournment Proceedings

throne speech, which is to actually table an aboriginal safe drinking water law. When can this law be expected to be forthcoming?

I would also appreciate a response from the member, not to put him on the spot. Our parliamentary committee has heard a lot of testimony about the need to step up federal action on the monitoring and enforcement for the protection of, particularly, the watershed of the Peace-Athabasca basin. Of course, that deals directly with access to aboriginal safe drinking water. I think that this law could also help clarify the rights of those people to safe drinking water.

Mr. Mark Warawa: Mr. Speaker, as the member well knows, this government is committed to clean drinking water for all Canadians. It is time that we as Canadians live up to the image that we have of ourselves, of Canada as a land of pristine waters. We need to protect those for this generation and future generations.

The NDP needs to do more than ask questions in the House and provide press releases. The NDP members need to vote in favour of money going to first nations. Their legacy is the party of no: no against the environment and no against cleaning up the mess left by the previous Liberal government.

This is the government that is taking action on the environment and cleaning up the environment. The member needs to do more than ask questions in the House. She needs to support good environmental legislation, as presented by this government.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): The motion to adjourn the House is now deemed to have been adopted. Accordingly, this House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 2 p.m., pursuant to Standing Order 24(1).

(The House adjourned at 6:47 p.m.)

CONTENTS

Tuesday, April 20, 2010

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

Committees of the House

Citizenship and Immigration

Mr. Tilson 1701

Royal Canadian Mounted Police Act

Mr. Gravelle 1701

Bill C-514. Introduction and first reading 1701

(Motions deemed adopted, bill read the first time and printed) 1701

Petitions

Air Passengers' Bill of Rights

Mr. Maloway 1701

Earthquake in Chile

Mr. Maloway 1701

Employment Insurance

Mr. Warawa 1701

Assisted Suicide

Mr. Warawa 1702

North Korean Refugees

Mr. Julian 1702

Questions on the Order Paper

Mr. Lukiwski 1702

Questions Passed as Orders for Returns

Mr. Lukiwski 1702

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

Business of Supply

Opposition motion—Representation of Quebec in the House of Commons

Mr. Paquette 1703

Motion 1703

Mr. Tilson 1704

Mr. Murphy (Moncton—Riverview—Dieppe) 1705

Mr. Laframboise 1705

Mr. Fletcher 1707

Mr. Murphy (Moncton—Riverview—Dieppe) 1707

Mr. Fletcher 1707

Mr. Julian 1710

Mr. Paillé (Hochelaga) 1710

Mr. Tilson 1711

Mr. Maloway 1711

Mr. Proulx 1711

Mr. Fletcher 1714

Mr. Paillé (Hochelaga) 1714

Mr. Hyer 1715

Mr. Mulcair 1715

Mr. Fletcher 1717

Mr. Paillé (Hochelaga) 1717

Mr. Tilson 1718

Mr. Christopherson 1718

Ms. Faille 1718

Mr. Calandra 1720

Mr. Cardin 1720

Ms. Bonsant 1721

Mr. Tilson 1722

Mr. Day 1722

Mr. Paillé (Hochelaga) 1723

Mr. Bevington 1723

Mr. Hawn 1723

Mr. Vellacott 1725

Ms. Bourgeois 1725

Ms. Bourgeois 1725

Mr. Trost 1726

Mr. Tilson 1726

Mr. Guimond (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques) 1727

Mr. Scarpaleggia 1728

Ms. Chow 1728

Mr. Murphy (Moncton—Riverview—Dieppe) 1728

Business of the House

Mr. Casson 1729

Motion 1729

(Motion agreed to) 1729

Business of Supply

Opposition Motion—Representation of Quebec in the House of Commons

Motion 1729

Mr. Murphy (Moncton—Riverview—Dieppe) 1729

Mr. Moore (Port Moody—Westwood—Port Coquitlam) 1730

Ms. Bourgeois 1730

Mrs. Mendes 1731

Auditor General of Canada

The Speaker 1731

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

National Victims of Crime Awareness Week

Mrs. Block 1731

Snowmobiling Ultimate Rider

Ms. Foote 1731

Millennium Summit

Ms. Faille 1732

G8 and G20 Summits

Ms. Chow 1732

Police Officers

Mr. Rathgeber 1732

Reel Student Productions

Mr. Regan 1732

Multiple Sclerosis

Mr. Miller 1733

National Volunteer Week	
Ms. Bourgeois	1733
Vaisakhi	
Mr. Uppal	1733
Stephen Turner	
Mr. Murphy (Charlottetown)	1733
Victims of Crime	
Mr. Petit	1733
Victoria Harbour	
Ms. Savoie	1734
National Volunteer Week	
Mr. Kerr	1734
École secondaire Pierre-Dupuy	
Mr. Duceppe	1734
Juno Awards	
Mr. Rodriguez	1734
Firearms Registry	
Mr. Rickford	1734

ORAL QUESTIONS

Ethics	
Mr. Ignatieff	1735
Mr. Harper	1735
Mr. Ignatieff	1735
Mr. Harper	1735
Mr. Ignatieff	1735
Mr. Harper	1735
Transportation	
Mr. McTeague	1735
Mr. Cannon	1735
Mr. McTeague	1735
Mr. Cannon	1735
Ethics	
Mr. Duceppe	1736
Mr. Harper	1736
Mr. Duceppe	1736
Mr. Harper	1736
Mr. Paquette	1736
Mr. Paradis	1736
Mr. Paquette	1736
Mr. Paradis	1736
Grant Forest Products	
Mr. Layton	1736
Mr. Clement	1736
Mr. Layton	1736
Mr. Clement	1736
Mr. Layton	1737
Mr. Clement	1737
Ethics	
Mr. Holland	1737
Mr. Baird	1737
Mr. Holland	1737
Mr. Baird	1737

Mr. Valeriote	1737
Mr. Goodyear	1737
Mr. Valeriote	1737
Mr. Goodyear	1737
Financial Institutions	
Mr. Paillé (Hochelaga)	1738
Mr. Flaherty	1738
Mr. Paillé (Hochelaga)	1738
Mr. Flaherty	1738
Afghanistan	
Mr. Bachand	1738
Mr. Nicholson	1738
Mr. Bachand	1738
Mr. MacKay	1738
Mr. Dosanjh	1738
Mr. Nicholson	1739
Mr. Dosanjh	1739
Mr. MacKay	1739
Health	
Ms. Neville	1739
Mrs. Aglukkaq	1739
Ms. Neville	1739
Mrs. Aglukkaq	1739
Firearms Registry	
Mrs. Block	1739
Mr. Toews	1739
Information Technology	
Mr. Christopherson	1740
Mr. Day	1740
Public Safety	
Mr. Davies (Vancouver Kingsway)	1740
Mr. Toews	1740
Arts and Culture	
Mrs. Lavallée	1740
Mr. Clement	1740
Mrs. Lavallée	1740
Mr. Clement	1740
Fisheries	
Mr. Byrne (Humber—St. Barbe—Baie Verte)	1740
Mrs. Shea	1741
Mr. Byrne (Humber—St. Barbe—Baie Verte)	1741
Mrs. Shea	1741
Northern Development	
Mr. Bevington	1741
Mr. Strahl	1741
Agriculture and Agri-Food	
Mr. Atamanenko	1741
Mr. Lemieux	1741
Justice	
Ms. Cadman	1741
Mr. Nicholson	1742
Public Safety	
Ms. Coady	1742

Mr. Toews	1742
Status of Women	
Ms. Demers	1742
Ms. Ambrose	1742
Automotive Industry	
Mr. Masse	1742
Mr. Baird	1742
Taxation	
Mr. Stanton	1742
Mr. Flaherty	1742
Information Technology	
Ms. Coady	1743
Mr. Day	1743
Broadband Canada Program	
Mr. Cardin	1743
Mr. Clement	1743

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

National Volunteer Week	
Mrs. Ablonczy	1743
Mr. Savage	1744
Mrs. Beaudin	1744
Mr. Martin (Sault Ste. Marie)	1744

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

Business of Supply	
Opposition motion—Representation of Quebec in the House of Commons	
Motion	1745
Mrs. Mendes	1745
Mrs. DeBellefeuille	1745
Mrs. DeBellefeuille	1745
Mr. Volpe	1747
Ms. Brunelle	1747
Ms. Brunelle	1747
Mr. Volpe	1748
Mr. Blaney	1749
Mr. Volpe	1750

Ms. Brunelle	1751
Mr. Reid	1751
Mr. Volpe	1753
Mr. Warkentin	1753
Ms. Lalonde	1753
Ms. Brunelle	1754
Mr. Bachand	1754
Mr. Weston (West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast—Sea to Sky Country)	1756
Mr. Christopherson	1756
Mr. Szabo	1757
Ms. Mathysen	1758
Ms. Davies (Vancouver East)	1758
Mr. Weston (West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast—Sea to Sky Country)	1759
Mr. Szabo	1760
Mr. Weston (West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast—Sea to Sky Country)	1760
Division on motion deferred	1761

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

Criminal Code	
Bill C-384, Second reading	1761
Mr. Bélanger	1761
Mr. Siksay	1762
Ms. Demers	1763
Mr. Uppal	1764
Mr. Savage	1765
Mr. Maloway	1766
Mr. Angus	1767
Ms. Lalonde	1767
Division on motion deferred	1768

ADJOURNMENT PROCEEDINGS

Status of Women	
Ms. Neville	1768
Mrs. Boucher	1769
Environment	
Ms. Duncan (Edmonton—Strathcona)	1770
Mr. Warawa	1770

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