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OFFICIAL REPORT
(HANSARD)

Wednesday, March 9, 2011

—
Speaker: The Honourable Peter Milliken

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HOUSE OF COMMONS

Wednesday, March 9, 2011

The House met at 2 p.m.

Prayers

• (1400)

[*English*]

The Speaker: It being Wednesday, we will now have the singing of the national anthem led by the hon. member for Winnipeg North.

[*Members sang the national anthem*]

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

[*English*]

OWEN SOUND

Mr. Larry Miller (Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to highlight an important infrastructure project in my riding of Bruce—Grey—Owen Sound.

Stimulus money is helping to erect a regional recreation centre that will serve the city of Owen Sound and surrounding communities. This state of the art facility will house two NHL-sized ice pads, an Olympic-sized swimming pool, a running-walking track, a gymnasium, fitness centre and seniors facilities.

The Owen Sound and Area Family YMCA will now have a new facility to call home. I applaud the work that it does to promote healthy lifestyles in our community.

This fall I, along with the YMCA and the OHL west division leading Owen Sound Attack, will host the Conservative hockey team in a benefit hockey challenge to raise funds to help complete this terrific facility.

The new Owen Sound Regional Recreation Centre is a great example of how the stimulus package in our economic action plan is working to help communities like Owen Sound build important infrastructure that will be enjoyed and used for generations to come.

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HOLOCAUST MEMORIAL CENTRE

Hon. Irwin Cotler (Mount Royal, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise to recognize and pay tribute to the Government of Macedonia and the Jewish community and Holocaust fund of the Republic of Macedonia for their joint initiative, under the patronage of President

Dr. Gjorge Ivanov, in inaugurating today a Holocaust Memorial Centre.

This centre will serve as a lasting memory to the 7,148 Jews from Macedonia who perished in the Shoah, onto each person there will be a name, an identity, reminding us that if someone saves a single life, it is as if he or she has saved an entire universe.

The Holocaust Memorial Centre will also bear witness to the long history of Macedonian and Balkan Jewry while promoting inter-religious and inter-ethnic understanding and co-operation in the region and beyond.

So, we members of this House join with them a common pledge: that never again will we be indifferent to racism and anti-Semitism; never again will we be silent in the face of evil; that we are each, wherever we are, in Macedonia or Canada, the guarantors of each other's destiny.

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[*Translation*]

CHIBOUGAMAU-CHAPAIS RED CROSS

Mr. Yvon Lévesque (Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik—Eeyou, BQ): Mr. Speaker, in honour of Red Cross Month, I would like to highlight the work of the team of volunteers at the Chibougamau-Chapais chapter in my riding, which has once again received an honour.

The team in Chibougamau-Chapais was awarded the 2010 Mention Or award for dedication by the Quebec division. This is the second year in a row that the chapter has won this particular award. Of the 97 local chapters in Quebec, the Chibougamau-Chapais chapter has been one of the most active thanks to the continued support of its volunteers. I would like to take this opportunity to encourage all the people in my riding, and also across Quebec and Canada, to invest in their communities and to work together for the common good.

My Bloc Québécois colleagues and I congratulate the Chibougamau-Chapais chapter of the Red Cross on its commitment and exemplary dedication.

Statements by Members

[English]

ANTI-BULLYING EVENT

Mr. Glenn Thibeault (Sudbury, NDP): Mr. Speaker, two weeks ago, I was lucky enough to be part of an anti-bullying flash mob event performed by students from my former high school, Lasalle Secondary School, led by teachers Camille Dupuis and Heather Boychuk.

The event was part of the “Pink Shirt Day” events taking place across Canada which encourage people to wear pink to show that we will not tolerate bullying in our schools or workplaces.

Unfortunately, far too many people in Canada are still victims of bullying. However, the fact that these students from Sudbury and thousands of others across the country are willing to stand up and say that enough is enough should give us all hope.

I would like to personally thank the organizations that helped to arrange the event: OPSEU locals 666 and 668, the Children's Aid Society, the Children's Community Network, the Children and Family Centre and, of course, the teachers and students at Lasalle who made this event so successful.

Together we can make bullying a thing of the past.

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● (1405)

WARKWORTH MAPLE SYRUP FESTIVAL

Mr. Rick Norlock (Northumberland—Quinte West, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is with pleasure that I inform the House that this weekend, my home community of Warkworth, Ontario will be celebrating the 25th annual Warkworth Maple Syrup Festival.

We would not have this festival without George and Alice Potter, the owners of Sandy Flat Sugar Bush and producers of some of the world's finest maple sugar products this side of heaven.

There is so much to do and see. There is free parking and free transportation to the sugar bush. There is even an indoor mini-putt, antique show, plank races, nature walks, a petting zoo, log sawing contest, free taffy tasting and much more.

The village also offers speciality shopping, an experience people will be hard pressed to find anywhere else, and some of the finest art, artisans and crafts in this country will be on display this weekend.

The pièce de résistance is, of course, a mouth-watering pancake meal of locally produced pork sausage, topped off with fresh creamy butter and the Potter's award-winning maple syrup.

Members are all invited to attend the 25th anniversary of the Warkworth Maple Syrup Festival this weekend.

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HUMAN RIGHTS

Mr. Gerard Kennedy (Parkdale—High Park, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to request that all members here take note of the plight of Tibetan environmental philanthropist Karma Samdrup.

Mr. Samdrup is imprisoned by the Chinese government in Tibet on what Human Rights Watch says are dated and “trumped up

charges”. Mr. Samdrup defended his brothers and was jailed when they challenged local officials in an environmental dispute. There are credible reports that Mr. Samdrup has been tortured during his imprisonment.

In 2006, Mr. Samdrup was CCTV's philanthropist of the year in China and today he is one of several cases of human rights abuse that concern Tibetan Canadians who tomorrow are marking the 52nd anniversary of Tibetan Uprising Day when they lost their independence.

Members of Mr. Samdrup's family, who live in Toronto, are among the many people looking to us. It is vital that we as parliamentarians are vigilant and remain consistent in our support of human rights no matter where they are threatened. We call on China to treat Mr. Samdrup with all the respect his human rights deserve.

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INCOME SPLITTING

Mr. Russ Hiebert (South Surrey—White Rock—Cloverdale, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in a few weeks, the House will be debating my private member's motion on income splitting, Motion No. 638.

Our government has cut taxes for families by an average of almost \$3,000 annually but taxes are still the biggest single expense families face. I am proposing that, as our budget comes back into balance, the government give priority to income splitting for families with children. Income splitting would ensure fairness for families, as all families earning the same income would pay the same tax, regardless of the individual spousal income. Research estimates that income splitting will save 2.3 million Canadian families over \$1,000 annually. That is more money Canadians can use for children's sports, summer camps and to save for post-secondary education.

I believe providing families with greater financial freedom through income splitting would create a brighter and more prosperous future for our nation. Canadians can learn more at my website www.familyincomesplitting.com.

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[Translation]

FORMER PUBLIC SECTOR INTEGRITY COMMISSIONER

Ms. Diane Bourgeois (Terrebonne—Blainville, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Standing Committee on Government Operations and Estimates has learned more about how former public sector integrity commissioner Christiane Ouimet was hired, about her shoddy work and about the golden parachute she was given.

First, the Conservative government outright rejected 12 candidates for the position in favour of someone with ties to the Privy Council Office. By proceeding in this way, the government simply carried on the Liberal tradition of hiring close friends while ensuring that the commissioner would not get the Conservatives into trouble.

When she was hired in 2007, Ms. Ouimet was well aware of her mandate under the Public Servants Disclosure Protection Act. But once she became the commissioner, she also became the government's puppet and abandoned more than 200 public servants who had filed complaints and were waiting for justice.

Finally, the \$500,000 golden parachute is nothing more than a Conservative government thank you to Ms. Ouimet for her sabotage.

* * *

HAITI

Mr. Mike Allen (Tobique—Mactaquac, CPC): Mr. Speaker, last week, the Minister of International Cooperation announced \$30 million in aid for 15 development projects in Haiti.

• (1410)

[English]

One of the education projects put forth was by the Association Québécoise pour l'avancement des Nations-Unies. The project will build a vocational school in memory of New Brunswick RCMP sergeant, Mark Gallagher, who was killed in the Haiti earthquake.

While AQANU along with les Petites Soeurs de Sainte-Thérèse were the applicants, this effort would not have happened without the vision of Woodstock High School teacher, Richard Blaquiére, and the support of a strong local committee comprised of co-chair John Slipp and representatives from the riding of Tobique—Mactaquac, including the local RCMP, school district, New Brunswick Teachers' Federation, the Rotary Club, politicians of all stripes and, of course, Mark's family.

I want to thank the local committee for its vision and perseverance as we have worked together toward this milestone. While Mark Gallagher may have left this world, through this school his legacy of sacrifice above self will live on in our hearts for many years to come.

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ISRAELI APARTHEID WEEK

Hon. Ken Dryden (York Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this is Israeli Apartheid Week. Universities are great places to discuss, debate and criticize and yet Israeli Apartheid Week often is not about discussion and debate. It is about intimidation and hate, where one voice overpowers and silences others and cuts them off.

Israel is not an apartheid state and yet if there is anything we have learned from the great slayer of South African apartheid, Nelson Mandela, conflict cannot be resolved with hate, because even if people do win they must live with one another. Living with one another is not just about talking, but listening; not just about knowing, but learning; not just about being right, but creating something better.

Our students have 60 or more years of their lives ahead of them. They will change Canada. They will create the global world of the

future. It is time for students involved in Israeli Apartheid Week to move on to something worthy of all that is in them, something worthy of the future.

The really sad part of Israeli Apartheid Week is that our students and our universities can do much better.

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NUTRITION NORTH CANADA

Mr. Greg Rickford (Kenora, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this morning in Iqaluit the Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development and the Minister of Health announced important adjustments to the nutrition north Canada program.

This government has listened to northerners, and we have taken action to ensure the successful transition to the nutrition north Canada program.

In order to ensure that northerners continue to have access to fresh, healthy and affordable foods, all food, as well as certain non-food items, will be temporarily returned to the list of products eligible for retail subsidy effective April 1. These adjustments to the nutrition north Canada program will be in place until the fall of 2012. During this transition period, our government will continue to work with the Nutrition North Canada External Advisory Board to address the concerns of northerners.

Our government is also continuing to explore ways to work with retailers and suppliers in transitioning to the new program. We look forward to the support and continued input of northerners.

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ACCESS TO MEDICINES

Ms. Megan Leslie (Halifax, NDP): Mr. Speaker, women and girls continue to be affected disproportionately by HIV and AIDS in sub-Saharan Africa. Better access to life-saving medicines would greatly benefit mothers and children living with HIV and AIDS, as well as help family members, particularly grandmothers caring for their grandchildren.

Bill C-393 proposes a one-licence solution that would greatly simplify the licensing process to export lower-cost generic medicines to developing countries.

I would like to recognize the support of this bill by the strong national network of grandmothers groups which seek to build solidarity, raise awareness and mobilize support in Canada for Africa's grandmothers. These women have built a strong two-way relationship that has proven to be a powerful challenge to a pharmaceutical industry that prioritizes profits over human rights, health, social and economic justice.

I hope that the actions of these grandmothers and of all women and girls working in solidarity with each other around the world will inspire the members of this House to pass Bill C-393.

Oral Questions

[Translation]

BLOC QUÉBÉCOIS

Mr. Daniel Petit (Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the hypocrisy displayed by the Bloc Québécois is appalling. The Bloc leader himself is the founding father of the tactic he is criticizing us for using.

Here is just one example: on July 15, 2004, before we were elected, the Bloc Québécois transferred \$17,071.20 to the candidate for Québec. Just a few hours later, on July 16, 2004, that same candidate transferred \$17,071.20 to the Bloc Québécois. What a coincidence. The money came in, then it went out.

Basically, the Bloc Québécois leader is trying desperately to trigger an election. While our economy is slowly recovering and Quebecers in all regions are thinking about job creation and the economy, the Bloc leader wants an election at all costs.

Fortunately, the Quebec Conservatives are here to represent all regions of Quebec, not just Plateau Mont-Royal.

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• (1415)

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL

Mr. Pierre Paquette (Joliette, BQ): Mr. Speaker, this year, Amnesty International is celebrating its 50th anniversary.

This organization is dedicated to defending human rights around the world and today has 3 million members in more than 150 countries and territories on five continents.

During the first international meeting, delegates from Europe and the United States decided to found a permanent international movement in defence of freedom of opinion and religion. The organization's activities have expanded since then.

In 1977, Amnesty International was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for having contributed to securing the ground for freedom, for justice, and thereby also for peace in the world. Amnesty International also pushed for the creation of a permanent international criminal court, the principle of which was adopted by the United Nations in 1998.

I also want to commend the work done by the Amnesty International group at the Thérèse-Martin secondary school in Joliette to campaign for the repatriation of young Khadr. This agency's list of human rights initiatives is impressive and, by all accounts, the coming years will be just as busy.

The Bloc Québécois wishes Amnesty International a happy 50th anniversary.

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[English]

POLITICAL FINANCING

Mr. Rodger Cuzner (Cape Breton—Canso, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as the Prime Minister and his parliamentary secretary try to confuse Canadians about the in and out scam, people know it is quite simple.

The Conservatives wired over a million bucks into 67 complicit Conservative ridings and then transferred the money right back out.

The dirty money went into national attack ads. The Conservative Party's national spending limits went out the window.

Sixty-seven forged advertising invoices went into Conservative ridings. Inflated election rebate claims were sent out to Elections Canada.

Hundreds of thousands of taxpayer dollars went into Conservative bank accounts, and nine sitting Conservative MPs still have not paid out this dirty money.

The RCMP went into Conservative headquarters. Boxes of damning evidence came out.

The Conservative Party was taken into Federal Court and came out as the obvious loser.

Now the Prime Minister's inner circle might go into prison and not come out for a very, very long time.

* * *

LIBERAL PARTY OF CANADA

Mr. Dean Del Mastro (Peterborough, CPC): Mr. Speaker, a February 2011 edition of Charlottetown's *The Guardian* featured an advertisement for the Liberal Party nomination meeting. The Liberals should listen as this pertains to them.

The ad happily notes that Liberal Party memberships are available for sale at the taxpayer-funded constituency office of the member of Parliament for Charlottetown. That is not all. It was quite a surprise, given that the member told this weekend's *The Guardian*:

Parliamentary materials are never allowed to be used for political gain, especially to drum up donations for political parties.

It sounds a bit like hypocrisy to me.

We know the Liberal Party has been infested with a culture of deceit for years. We know how Liberal Party operatives used taxpayer money in the sponsorship scandal.

We, on this side of the House, think that is not right. That is why I have asked the Conflict of Interest and Ethics Commissioner, Mary Dawson, and you, Mr. Speaker, to investigate this serious breach of parliamentary rules and get back to us about what is going to happen with this breach by the Liberal Party.

ORAL QUESTIONS

[English]

POLITICAL FINANCING

Hon. Michael Ignatieff (Leader of the Opposition, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, one minister in the government is charged with misleading the House. Another has turned his department into Conservative Party re-election central. Nine sitting Conservative MPs took money from taxpayers in an election fraud scheme. As if that were not quite enough, the Prime Minister decided to rename the Government of Canada after himself.

Oral Questions

Does the Prime Minister not understand that these actions damage Canadian democracy?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I do not agree with any of those things.

The focus of the Government of Canada is the focus of Canadians, and that is the economy and the creation of jobs.

Canada's economic performance continues to be among the strongest in the world and we are emerging in a very strong position.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Michael Ignatieff (Leader of the Opposition, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister is not even bothering to reply. He is not firing people who were involved in election fraud. The Prime Minister refuses to reimburse taxpayers and instead is attempting to smear Elections Canada, a renowned institution.

Does the Prime Minister not have any respect for the democratic institutions of Canada?

• (1420)

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we have had a dispute with Elections Canada for five years. In our institutions, these disagreements are dealt with by the courts, and that is what we are doing. We are defending our position.

Hon. Michael Ignatieff (Leader of the Opposition, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we are not talking about discussions and differences of opinion, but of charges of fraud laid by the Attorney General.

[*English*]

Last night the House passed a resolution ordering the Prime Minister to fire those connected with this election scam. We are talking about four members of his inner circle. But there is a fifth man involved, and that is the chief of staff of the Prime Minister, who in 2006 was the secretary of the Conservative fund.

Is the Prime Minister asking us to believe that Nigel Wright knew nothing about this election scam?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, that individual has not been accused of anything. Yesterday when the leader of the Liberal Party was asked to make allegations against him outside the House of Commons where he does not face legal protection, he declined to do so.

I would suggest he not make allegations against an individual who is not accused of anything.

* * *

[*Translation*]

CITIZENSHIP AND IMMIGRATION

Mr. Justin Trudeau (Papineau, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Immigration has such elastic ethics that he does not even see that he has become the incarnation of a conflict of interest. He is supposed to be the guardian of Canadian citizenship, but instead of helping new Canadians build better lives, he prefers to hold them hostage. For political gain, he is taking advantage of the vulnerability of those who believed that they could build better lives by coming here.

How can he have the gall to resort to such despicable blackmail and target those he refers to as “very ethnic”? It is disgraceful. Will he admit it?

Hon. Jason Kenney (Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as I said, we are very proud of the government's track record with regard to the aspirations and values of new Canadians. That is why I am seeing more and more cultural communities supporting the Conservative Party.

[*English*]

Since that member talks about abuse of resources, and we know he is paid about \$140,000 as a member of Parliament, I believe he is also paid several thousand dollars for commercial speaking gigs. That gives a new meaning to free speech, I guess.

On Wednesday, February 9 when Liberal members were in caucus, he was speaking in Toronto. Was he paid for that?

Mr. Justin Trudeau (Papineau, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the minister should defend himself.

Not only has he politicized the minister's awards, he politicized ministerial missions by including Parm Gill, the Conservative candidate in Brampton—Springdale, in his 2009 official trip to India. This conduct undermines the very values and fairness of Canada's just society, the one my father fought for, the one the charter upholds, the one people around the world look to as an inspiration, the one we Canadians believe in to our bones.

How dare the minister show such wanton disrespect for all Canadians?

Hon. Jason Kenney (Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism, CPC): Mr. Speaker, let me tell members what his father did with immigration when we hit a recession, led by the Liberals, in the early 1980s. He slashed immigration to 80,000. Our government has maintained historically high immigration levels during the recession.

In terms of social justice, his father's government refused to apologize to Chinese Canadians for the head tax, to the Ukrainian Canadians for their internment, to Japanese Canadians for their internment, or for the shame of the Indian residential schools, unlike our Prime Minister.

He still has not answered the question. Did he take a paid speaking gig during parliamentary duties on February 9? I would like to know.

* * *

[*Translation*]

POLITICAL FINANCING

Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Conservative Party can deny the facts, invent figures and make excuses all it wants, but it is the only party that misused public funds and is the only party that was accused by Elections Canada, which recently ruled that the party had violated the financing rules during the 2005-06 election. And now we have learned that the Prime Minister's current chief of staff, Nigel Wright, knew about the in and out scheme.

Oral Questions

Does that not prove that the Prime Minister authorized this misuse of public funds for partisan purposes, thus violating the Canada Elections Act?

• (1425)

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, that individual has not been charged. We have a dispute with Elections Canada regarding the definition of local and national expenses. This dispute is before the courts and we are defending our position.

Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, Elections Canada has ruled: the money that the Conservative Party obtained through the in and out scheme is illegal.

Will the Prime Minister—who accused the Liberals of campaigning with dirty money, I should point out—ask the Conservative Party to reimburse the money that it illegally obtained?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is clear that Elections Canada has ruled differently on this issue in different ridings. This case is before the courts and we will obviously respect the final decision of these courts.

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CITIZENSHIP AND IMMIGRATION

Mr. Thierry St-Cyr (Jeanne-Le Ber, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the immigration minister is doing nothing to clarify the difference between his role as a minister and his role as a political organizer. The minister is going out of his way to the blur the lines between the two, to the point where it is becoming impossible to tell the difference between a citizenship certificate and a Conservative Party membership card. That is how hard he has worked to confuse the two. It smells phishy to me, phishy with a “ph”.

Since the Minister of Immigration is unable to make the distinction between his role as a minister and the partisan interests of the Conservative Party, will the Prime Minister relieve him of his duties?

Hon. Jason Kenney (Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism, CPC): Mr. Speaker, of course I see the difference.

He brought up the issue of Canadian citizenship. Like all members of the Conservative Party, including those from Quebec, I believe in the value of Canadian citizenship. We are proud to be Canadian.

This member and the rest of the Bloc want to put an end to Canadian citizenship for Quebecers. Shame! New Canadians in Quebec are proud of their Canadian citizenship, and we will defend it.

Mr. Thierry St-Cyr (Jeanne-Le Ber, BQ): Mr. Speaker, if anyone is bringing shame on being Canadian, it is the Minister of Immigration. He does not seem to understand how questionable it is to target voter groups based on their ethnicity. Apparently the minister does not understand that his racial profiling is sending a terrible message to new ethnocultural groups that the Conservative Party sees them as less desirable.

Do the Minister of Immigration and the Prime Minister recognize that it is inappropriate for the Minister of Immigration to be separating new immigrants into two classes of citizens?

Hon. Jason Kenney (Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism, CPC): Mr. Speaker, let us be clear. This party, this government is proud to reflect the values and aspirations of new Canadians, and it is proud of the diversity of our cultural communities. We are also proud that the vast majority of newcomers to Quebec believe in Canada. They want their place in Canada. They want to keep their Canadian citizenship, and we will work with them, in Quebec and across Canada, to strengthen this country and this unity.

* * *

[*English*]

POLITICAL FINANCING

Ms. Libby Davies (Vancouver East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, Conservatives are again using their book of dirty tricks to deflect Canadians from the truth. They are trotting the tired old “everybody does it” defence. This is not true.

Only Conservatives use local ridings to circumvent spending rules. Only Conservatives scheme to break the law. Only Conservatives were raided by the RCMP. Only Conservatives are potentially facing jail time.

When will they stop making a mockery of the rule of law?

Mr. Pierre Poilievre (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister and to the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I think the hon. member will have occasion to stand and explain why on March 31, 2006, months after the election was over, the national NDP transferred \$2,612 to her riding association. On March 31, 2006, the exact same day, her riding association transferred back \$2,600 for the national NDP.

That was \$2,600 in and \$2,600 out. I invite her now to explain that transaction.

• (1430)

Ms. Libby Davies (Vancouver East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, that is ridiculous. The Conservatives do not have a single piece of evidence to back up their wild claims.

This is about a government that does not know the difference between right and wrong. What we did was legal. What the Conservatives did was illegal. We respected the spending limits and they exceeded the spending limits.

When will they stop making up these stories about in and out, acknowledge their mistakes and show that they understand the difference between what is right and what is wrong?

Mr. Pierre Poilievre (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister and to the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, if the hon. member will not explain her in and out transaction, maybe this email will. It comes from Lucy Ladouceur, who is the bookkeeper for the New Democratic Party of Canada. She said:

“—we are told by the communication folks in B.C. that these radio ads, with the candidate's personal tag at the end, therefore a local expense to be reported under the candidate's expense ceiling... For rebate purposes, we were asked to bill each campaign—in the case of Vancouver East, \$2,612.”

Oral Questions

“The good news is that the federal [MP]...will transfer \$2,600 to the federal riding association, as we agreed to pay for the ads.”

That is exactly what happened: \$2,600 in and \$2,600 out.

* * *

CITIZENSHIP AND IMMIGRATION

Ms. Olivia Chow (Trinity—Spadina, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism cannot tell the difference between right and wrong. He cannot be trusted to tell the difference between his partisan interests and the interests of ordinary Canadians.

The minister has the power to determine the life or death of refugees. He has the power over those who want to curry favour from the government.

When will he stop abusing his power and shaking down immigrants?

Hon. Jason Kenney (Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this is all completely ridiculous. What the member appears to be referring to is the fact that the Conservative Party of Canada is planning an advertising campaign in cultural community media about the great things we have done for new Canadians.

That is called democracy. Those people can then choose whom to vote for whenever the next election happens, and a lot more of them will be choosing to vote Conservative than New Democrat.

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POLITICAL FINANCING

Ms. Judy Foote (Random—Burin—St. George's, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, last night the House, the Canadian people's House, voted to have the Conservative government repay money it illegally obtained from election fraud. Nine Conservative MPs, including two cabinet ministers, got money back in their bank accounts.

This is a fraud based on 67 forged invoices, where \$200,000 of taxpayer money went into and is still sitting in Conservative bank accounts.

Why has the Prime Minister not ordered that these illegal moneys be returned to Canadian taxpayers?

Mr. Pierre Poilievre (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister and to the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member is quite right to point out that Elections Canada did give rebates to Conservatives in transactions that we believed, and have argued successfully, were completely in line with the rules of ethics and the laws. We would only ask that Elections Canada be consistent.

Indeed, I think the hon. member will rise and explain why on July 9, 2004, the national Liberal Party transferred \$5,000 in to the Don Valley West Liberal Association and then on July 15, one week later, that association transferred exactly \$5,000 back. She should explain.

Ms. Judy Foote (Random—Burin—St. George's, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this is not an accounting dispute. This is not a disagreement over legal fine print. Senior Conservatives decided they would forge documents, lie to Elections Canada and they could now face jail

time. They did it in 67 ridings. The former Conservative member for Simcoe-Grey refused to do it because she knew it was wrong.

Will the Prime Minister stop disparaging Elections Canada, stop attacking his own public prosecutor and get his MPs to return the money they owe to Canadians?

Mr. Pierre Poilievre (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister and to the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, on July 21, 2004, the Liberal Party of Canada transferred exactly \$5,000 to the Liberal riding association of Oak Ridges—Markham. On August 16, 2004, not even a month later, that same riding association transferred back \$5,000 to the national Liberal Party.

In all of these instances, where Liberal, New Democrat and Bloc Québécois members engaged in the in and out transfers, Elections Canada provided rebates and legitimized them. We are asking only that it do the exact same thing for Conservative members.

● (1435)

[*Translation*]

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc (Beauséjour, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Foreign Affairs and the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs received tens of thousands of dollars in rebates from taxpayers thanks to the Conservatives' election fraud. The same is true of the members for Beauce, Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, Lévis—Bellechasse and Lotbinière—Chutes-de-la-Chaudière. They must have thought that it paid to forge invoices. We shall see whether their Conservative colleagues in the Senate find that it pays.

Why have the ministers kept their portfolios after they were caught with their hands in taxpayers' pockets?

[*English*]

Mr. Pierre Poilievre (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister and to the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member is quite right that Elections Canada correctly honoured the rebates of the candidates in question and, in so doing, only legitimized the approach that we and all parties had undertaken in the past.

I give yet another example. Speaking of Simcoe—Grey, on July 19, 2004, the national Liberal Party transferred \$5,000 in. One week later that riding association transferred \$4,500 back to the Liberal Party. That was another in and out transfer that Elections Canada accepted as a local expense. We ask only that it apply the same rules to all parties.

Oral Questions

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc (Beauséjour, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the parliamentary secretary falsely claims that everybody did it. He is missing a few key differences here. The RCMP raided the offices of the Conservatives, not ours. They forged documents, we did not. Their senior officials and senators are facing election fraud charges that could land them in jail and we are not. We followed the rules.

The Prime Minister's chief of staff, Nigel Wright, a senior adviser in the campaign, was one of the key people controlling money in that election. What did Nigel Wright know about this electoral fraud and why did he not try to stop it?

Hon. John Baird (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Liberal leader was very brave and made all kinds of accusations against someone who has never been charged with anything. However, when he stepped outside this place and was asked to repeat exactly what he said in here, he lacked the courage of his convictions. He did not have the guts. He scurried out of the press scrum faster than he could.

Let him show the courage of his convictions, let him stand outside this place and repeat that outrageous accusation.

* * *

[*Translation*]

TRANSPORTATION OF NUCLEAR WASTE

Ms. Paule Brunelle (Trois-Rivières, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the BAPE has just recommended a strategic environmental assessment and the establishment of strict standards before shale gas development is allowed in Quebec. This should also be the case for the shipping of nuclear waste on the St. Lawrence.

Out of respect for Quebec's territorial sovereignty, will the government take steps to overturn the Canadian Nuclear Safety Commission decision and block the shipping of nuclear waste on the river until an organizations such as the BAPE carries out a rigorous environmental assessment?

Hon. Christian Paradis (Minister of Natural Resources, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as my colleague knows, the Canadian Nuclear Safety Commission is responsible for this sector. It is the independent regulator that makes decisions in such cases. That is what happened. A decision was made by a panel of independent experts after they heard from 77 different intervenors.

Ms. Paule Brunelle (Trois-Rivières, BQ): Mr. Speaker, a preliminary environmental assessment is even more important given that the Canadian Nuclear Safety Commission president has indicated that this shipment of nuclear waste is but the first in a series of shipments that could be made on the St. Lawrence.

Will the Minister of Natural Resources ensure that Ontario's nuclear waste does not travel through Quebec, at least until an environmental assessment is carried out?

Hon. Christian Paradis (Minister of Natural Resources, CPC): Mr. Speaker, an independent commission, the Canadian Nuclear Safety Commission, is responsible for implementing the regulations. It is an independent regulator made up of independent experts. This commission made a decision based on 77 presentations. Three public hearings were held. I also asked the commission to be proactive and provide technical briefings to anyone interested. Therefore, if there

are legal challenges, they will be heard by the courts, which will do what they have to do.

* * *

• (1440)

THE ENVIRONMENT

Mr. Bernard Bigras (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, while a new study shows that the ice cap in the far north is melting because of climate change, researchers from Sherbrooke are getting ready to dismantle the PEARL atmospheric observatory in Nunavut. These researchers are still waiting to find out whether funding for the Canadian Foundation for Climate and Atmospheric Sciences will be renewed.

What is the government waiting for to confirm that funding for climate change research will be renewed?

Hon. Peter Kent (Minister of the Environment, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the hon. member for his question. I can only tell him to be patient and wait until the budget is brought down on March 22.

Mr. Bernard Bigras (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, instead of wasting \$1 million distributing weather alert equipment to our schools for the sake of raising its profile, the federal government should instead be renewing funding for the Canadian Foundation for Climate and Atmospheric Sciences and ensuring that the PEARL atmospheric observatory can continue its work.

Instead of handing out useless gadgets, why does the federal government not provide better funding to scientific research into climate change?

Hon. Peter Kent (Minister of the Environment, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the program funded by the National Search and Rescue Secretariat to send weather radio receivers to schools and guide and scout camps, was created following the devastating tornadoes that hit southern Ontario in 2008.

[*English*]

The weather radio receiver allows school authorities to be instantly alerted when severe weather threatens. Weather radio is the only system like this in Canada. Why does the Bloc take issue with school children having—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Kings Hants.

* * *

PUBLIC SAFETY

Hon. Scott Brison (Kings—Hants, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, after they spent Canada into a record \$56 billion deficit, the Conservatives still refuse to come clean on the cost of their failed U.S.-style prison bills.

The Parliamentary Budget Officer has been clear. He said that the government has not provided the finance committee with the information.

Oral Questions

When will the Conservatives stop hiding the truth from Canadians? Why are they treating Parliament and the Canadian taxpayer with such contempt?

Hon. Vic Toews (Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Mr. Speaker, while we are speaking on the issue of prisons, the other week I was in Newfoundland and Labrador.

The Liberal MPs asked us to build a new prison in Newfoundland and Labrador. At the same time, the Liberal leader was saying we should not build prisons. I am wondering whether the Liberals could get together on that particular issue and figure out where they stand in respect of criminal justice issues. Why do they not want to see dangerous criminals locked up and ordinary Canadians safe on the streets?

Hon. Scott Brison (Kings—Hants, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is very clear that the Conservative regime would rather hire more prison guards than hire more front-line nurses.

The Conservatives will not tell Parliament how many billions their prison bills will cost. Why will the finance minister not come clean with the costs? Is it that he has not done his homework and does not know the real costs of his U.S.-style megaprison agenda, or is he cooking the books to hide the true deficit numbers, just like he did in Ontario?

Hon. Vic Toews (Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we know one thing for certain and that is that the Liberals do not support our prison guards in our prisons.

The Liberals have consistently come out on the side of the prisoner. When the public safety critic from the Liberal Party goes into a prison, he comes out wondering about the morale of the prisoners. He never once stops to talk about victims, or about the prison guards who are doing a great job keeping Canadians safe.

* * *

[Translation]

NATIONAL DEFENCE

Mr. Marc Garneau (Westmount—Ville-Marie, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Conservatives refuse to come clean with Canadian taxpayers.

They are basically telling us that they are going to purchase aircraft but that they are not going to tell us how much those aircraft cost. They are refusing to hold a competitive bidding process to ensure that the Canadian Forces get the best aircraft for the best price. They are also carrying out a costly propaganda campaign with ministers and generals to try to justify their bad decision. We all know that the actual cost has doubled since the program began.

Why are they hiding the truth from us?

• (1445)

Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, that is completely untrue.

[English]

We have committed \$9 billion for the acquisition of 65 aircraft. These are the same aircraft that the party opposite committed to back in 1997.

This \$9 billion is committed not only for the cost of the 65 aircraft, but also the associated weapons system, supporting infrastructure, initial spares, training simulators, contingency funds and project operating costs.

This is funded through the Canada first defence strategy. This is an excellent aircraft for the best air force in the world.

Mr. Marc Garneau (Westmount—Ville-Marie, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, when Canadians buy a car, they look at several models and choose the best model for their needs. Then they go to more than one dealership to see which one will give them the best price. That is how they get the best deal.

Apparently wiser than the minister, most Canadians also know that it is worth bargaining before buying the car. If the car dealer knows the purchaser has several options, he will try harder to win his or her business with the best deal possible.

It is the same thing with jets. What does the government not understand about the value of holding a competition before making the most expensive purchase in Canadian history?

Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, there was a competition and it happened on the watch of the Liberal Party.

The F-35 is by far the best fifth generation aircraft, and in fact, the only fifth generation aircraft available.

We will not endanger the lives of Canadian pilots. We will not endanger the sovereignty of our country. We will proceed with this project. It is important that we give the best air force the best equipment at the best price and not delay, as we saw with the EH-101 project.

I hear the member for Wascana bawling and braying like a baby donkey with its head stuck in a fence. He is upset because he is in opposition. He had better get used to it.

* * *

JUSTICE

Mr. Scott Armstrong (Cumberland—Colchester—Musquodoboit Valley, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our government is committed to making our communities and streets safer by getting tough on crime.

In recent weeks three important pieces of legislation have passed in the Senate and now await royal assent.

Could the Minister of Justice please update the House on the importance of these pieces of legislation?

Hon. Rob Nicholson (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to say that in the last two weeks we have passed three bills. We will get rid of the faint hope clause ensuring that those who decide to commit murder will serve at least 25 years in prison. In addition, we are ending the sentencing discount for multiple murders. Finally, we have passed our important bill to better protect children from online sexual exploitation.

There are a lot more bills before Parliament. I call on the coalition to get its act together and start supporting victims and law-abiding Canadians.

*Oral Questions***SPORTS**

Mr. Glenn Thibeault (Sudbury, NDP): Mr. Speaker, this country was stunned silent last night as we witnessed yet another shattering on-ice head shot. Max Pacioretty joins a long list of athletes who will soon know the devastating effects of a concussion.

Traumatic brain injuries are not just affecting NHL players. They are also affecting amateur athletes and our children. The game is faster. The equipment is harder. Strategies are needed to protect young Canadian athletes.

Will the government support our bill to reduce concussions and serious injuries in amateur sports?

Hon. Gary Lunn (Minister of State (Sport), CPC): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the member for his question and his serious interest. This is a serious issue, something we have taken very seriously.

We have spoken with national sports organizations. I am working with the Minister of Health on strategies of bringing them together. It is something that we are concerned about.

Obviously, I saw the same hit the member did last night in an NHL hockey game. It is something we hope that the NHL also takes very seriously. That type of hitting is unacceptable.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Thomas Mulcair (Outremont, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the minister must understand that a helmet protects the skull and not the brain. Doctors, sports associations and experts agree that we are experiencing nothing less than an epidemic of concussions and spinal injuries.

How many other cases like that of Max Pacioretty do we need to see? How many more young players must be seriously injured? What will it take for him to act? We have a Minister of State for Sport, but what is he being paid to do?

For a year now, the NDP has been proposing concrete solutions. What is the government waiting for to take action?

• (1450)

[*English*]

Hon. Gary Lunn (Minister of State (Sport), CPC): Mr. Speaker, first of all, yes, we are fully engaged with national sports organizations. We have some that are actually doing a very good job. We continue to work with them and continue to do the research. I am working with the Minister of Health on strategies in how we can bring about greater awareness.

At the end of the day, we have to work with the experts. I understand this raises the issue about helmets. We have to ensure that we have raised awareness.

I was deeply concerned at what we saw in the NHL game last night. I saw the hockey player out cold on the ice as well. Again, we will do everything to ensure that the NHL does not allow this kind of action to continue.

[*Translation*]

SECURITIES

Mr. Daniel Paillé (Hochelaga, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the proposed merger of the London and Toronto stock exchanges has raised concerns in Quebec and Ontario among small and medium-size businesses and big banks alike. Quebec, the Autorité des marchés financiers and other provincial agencies all want to have a say, particularly concerning the repercussions of this potential transaction.

Can the minister responsible for examining this transaction calm the waters and promise that he will not make any decision until Quebec and the Autorité des marchés financiers have made their decision?

Hon. Tony Clement (Minister of Industry, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I had discussions with the Quebec and Ontario finance ministers. I told them it was important to have information and input from Ontario and Quebec before any decision is made at the federal level. They said that that was possible.

Mr. Daniel Paillé (Hochelaga, BQ): Mr. Speaker, this issue is just further proof that Quebec needs to preserve its Autorité des marchés financiers and its jurisdictions. If the securities commission the Conservatives want were in place, Quebec would not have any say at all. The Alberta Court of Appeal rejects the Conservative plan. It found that it would be a federal intrusion into provincial jurisdictions.

Will the Minister of Finance consider the fact that the appeal court in the home province of the Prime Minister and the Minister of State for Finance issued a final ruling? Will the government finally abandon its predatory, centralist project, which basically only Toronto supports?

[*English*]

Hon. Ted Menzies (Minister of State (Finance), CPC): Mr. Speaker, in fact we have many provinces that are supporting this voluntary project. Many provinces are onside and continue to support our proposal. I remind the hon. member that it is voluntary.

We have referred this matter to the Supreme Court. I suggest that we wait for the Supreme Court's ruling on the jurisdiction of this.

* * *

[*Translation*]

FORMER PUBLIC SECTOR INTEGRITY COMMISSIONER

Mr. Jean-Claude D'Amours (Madawaska—Restigouche, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, voluntarily quitting your job should not mean winning the lottery. Yet the Prime Minister paid the former public sector integrity commissioner half a million dollars so that she would quit her job and keep quiet. That is completely unacceptable. People in my riding, where the average personal income is \$26,288, would need to work more than 20 years to earn that kind of money.

How can Canadians trust a Prime Minister who meddles in the work of an independent officer of Parliament and then gives her half a million dollars to keep her mouth shut?

Oral Questions

Hon. Stockwell Day (President of the Treasury Board and Minister for the Asia-Pacific Gateway, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the government sought legal advice about this situation and then followed that advice. According to the information I have, the person my colleague referred to will appear before a parliamentary committee tomorrow to respond to questions.

[English]

Ms. Siobhan Coady (St. John's South—Mount Pearl, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this is a sordid affair. First the minister denied meeting with the former integrity commissioner and now we know that he did. Then he hid behind a legal opinion, but he would not produce it. There were 228 whistleblowers who were ignored.

The average income in my riding is \$31,456. Taxpayers are outraged that the former integrity commissioner was paid an obscene half a million dollars to quit and then disappear to Florida.

When did the minister meet with the commissioner? What was discussed? Did he authorize the payment of the hush money?

• (1455)

Hon. Stockwell Day (President of the Treasury Board and Minister for the Asia-Pacific Gateway, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I addressed all these questions yesterday and I will do it again today.

When it comes to the legal advice, we are looking at the question in terms of what, if any, of that can be released.

I have also said that following the Auditor General's report, which shows how these cases had been handled or had not been handled, there were some serious difficulties, but we are looking at the question of recoverability.

The former commissioner is appearing before the all-party committee tomorrow. That is the proper place to address this because it is that committee that is seized with this issue and it should be.

We are concerned about the whistleblowers and their protection.

* * *

POVERTY

Mr. Tony Martin (Sault Ste. Marie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the government's refusal to implement a national poverty strategy is an insult to our vulnerable citizens. For three years, the human resources committee has heard from 260 witnesses who have overwhelmingly called for Ottawa to lead in the fight against poverty. Their testimony showed, without a doubt, that Canadians expect to see a plan to address this issue. However, it now seems clear they cannot expect that type of leadership from the government.

When will the Conservatives ditch their ideology and stop writing off so many people?

Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we believe that the best way to fight poverty is to create jobs, to create a strong economy, and to give people the skills to compete and succeed in our economy.

Throughout the recession, we have been doing just that. We put 1.2 million people into skills training. We enhanced the supports

while they lost their jobs, while focusing on creating new jobs through investments in infrastructure and expanding access to jobs.

We are there. We have been supporting them, fighting poverty every step of the way. Unfortunately, the NDP has voted against every single thing we have done to help the vulnerable.

Mr. Tony Martin (Sault Ste. Marie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the suffering in our communities shows the government is dead wrong. The Conservatives are writing off the potential of so many of our citizens. Four million Canadians still live in poverty. The jobs being created are part-time, low wage and without benefits.

Today, the Hamilton Roundtable for Poverty Reduction expressed its deep disappointment in the government, saying that a national poverty strategy is essential in building the country's prosperity.

Does the government understand that it needs to lead on this issue? Does it know that Canadians expect leadership in the fight against poverty?

Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we really do believe that the best way to fight poverty is to help people get a job and get the skills they need for their job, and to create those jobs. Through our economic action plan, we have created over 460,000 jobs across this country. Not only that, but many of these are really good-paying jobs. We have helped 1.2 million Canadians get the training and the skills they need for the jobs of today and the jobs of tomorrow.

We are investing in Canadians because we believe in them. We are working to prevent poverty. Unfortunately, the NDP is trying to mire people in it.

* * *

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Mr. Dave Van Kesteren (Chatham-Kent—Essex, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as our economy continues to recover from the economic downturn, many emerging companies in southern Ontario, including start-up businesses in my riding, are faced with funding challenges. Our government knows the importance and the impact of angel and venture capital investments on the development of Canadian businesses.

Would the Minister of State for FedDev please inform the House about the steps that our government has taken to increase private sector investment in start-up businesses.

Hon. Gary Goodyear (Minister of State (Science and Technology) (Federal Economic Development Agency for Southern Ontario), CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the member for Chatham-Kent—Essex for his hard work.

Oral Questions

The government set up FedDev to ensure that job creators in southern Ontario have the tools they need to create jobs and succeed. Under our government, I am proud to say that venture capital in Ontario has increased by 43% from 2009 to 2010. It is through new programs like investing in business innovation that we look forward to more success for Ontario entrepreneurs and even more jobs for Canadians.

* * *

FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Hon. Dan McTeague (Pickering—Scarborough East, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, for 15 months Canadian Philip Halliday has languished in a Spanish prison, awaiting his chance to prove his innocence.

He is also waiting desperately for much needed gallbladder surgery. He has lost almost 50 pounds. And now we have learned that he is now suffering from very serious liver and kidney diseases, which are in fact leading to substantial unintended consequences.

Would the minister responsible for consular affairs finally ask Spanish authorities to provide Mr. Halliday with immediate treatment to save his life?

• (1500)

Hon. Diane Ablonczy (Minister of State of Foreign Affairs (Americas and Consular Affairs), CPC): Mr. Speaker, we are aware of this case, of course. We are actively providing consular assistance and support to Mr. Halliday. We are in regular contact with his partner here in Canada. We have also requested that Canada's ambassador to Spain be engaged with local authorities to request help for the medical situation that the member mentioned.

* * *

[Translation]

VETERANS

Mr. Guy André (Berthier—Maskinongé, BQ): Mr. Speaker, Mark Campbell, a soldier who stepped on a bomb in June 2008 in Afghanistan and lost both of his legs, has said that the new veterans charter is an abject betrayal, since it robs wounded soldiers of 40% of their income. The new lump sum payments pale in comparison to the lifetime pensions that were paid until the Conservatives made this abject decision.

Why is the government trying to save money at the expense of the new generation of veterans?

Hon. Jean-Pierre Blackburn (Minister of Veterans Affairs and Minister of State (Agriculture), CPC): Mr. Speaker, the charter that was unanimously adopted in the House in 2005 had some flaws. We are correcting them with Bill C-55, which will address questions that were raised today in a newspaper article.

Once this bill passes, the minimum that an individual participating in a rehabilitation program will receive will be \$40,000 per year. For a veteran who cannot return to work, the minimum will be \$58,000 per year. Furthermore, we will correct the problems with the lump sum payment, which will become optional.

[English]

Mr. Peter Stoffer (Sackville—Eastern Shore, NDP): Mr. Speaker, Canada's RCMP and veterans are Canada's heroes, yet last

fall the personal medical information of one of those heroes, Captain Sean Bruyca, was spread throughout the Department of Veterans Affairs by teenage children looking at a dirty magazine.

The reality is that the Privacy Commissioner said that some DVA employees broke the law. The minister himself said those responsible would be fired, yet today we learned that 3 of them were promoted and 54 got a slap on the wrist.

How can any veteran in the future ever trust the government or the Department of Veterans Affairs? When will the Minister of Veterans Affairs call for a public inquiry into this sordid affair?

[Translation]

Hon. Jean-Pierre Blackburn (Minister of Veterans Affairs and Minister of State (Agriculture), CPC): Mr. Speaker, the brave men and woman who have served in our armed forces deserve dignity and respect. As soon as the Privacy Commissioner informed me of irregularities regarding the protection of personal information, we took action on two fronts.

First, we conducted an internal investigation to find out what was going on. Second, we implemented 10 new measures to ensure that our veterans' information would be protected. None of our employees can now claim that they do not know.

* * *

[English]

ABORIGINAL AFFAIRS

Mr. Rob Clarke (Desnethé—Missinippi—Churchill River, CPC): Mr. Speaker, first nations chiefs and councils still do not have to publicly disclose to their band members how much money they make. On-reserve residents, regular Canadians, and our Conservative government say that is wrong. There needs to be more transparency and accountability. Surprisingly, the national chief is still dismissing private member's Bill C-575.

Could the Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development tell us why the first nations financial transparency act is so vital?

Mr. Greg Rickford (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the question and the hard work of the member in the standing committee.

Bill C-575 is another important tool for hard-working chiefs and councillors to bring more accountability and transparency to their members. This legislation would give all MPs the opportunity to support accountability in first nations communities. I want to thank Liberal members, including the former leader of the opposition, who did just that last week.

We call on the Liberals who took a principled stand against their leader's orders to continue to support Bill C-575 to enhance accountability for first nations communities, their members and all Canadians.

* * *

PRESENCE IN GALLERY

The Speaker: Order. I would like to draw to the attention of hon. members the presence in the gallery of the Honourable Roger Fitzgerald, Speaker of the House of Assembly of Newfoundland and Labrador.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear!

* * *

● (1505)

POINTS OF ORDER

ORAL QUESTIONS

Mr. Justin Trudeau (Papineau, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism told the House a little while ago that I gave a speech in Toronto on Wednesday, February 9. I know he would be horrified to think that he might have misled the House, so I am happy to give him the opportunity to set the record straight.

Attendance records confirm that I was indeed in caucus that Wednesday morning. In fact, I remember it well. Everyone brought their skates to caucus because as soon as it was over, we crossed the street and I went skating with our leader on the Rideau Canal. I would be happy to ask for unanimous consent to table a picture of my son on my shoulders while I was skating on the Rideau Canal.

I was there that afternoon for question period and there that evening for votes.

Hon. Jason Kenney (Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would also be happy to table a picture of that member at Advertising Week 2011, at which he was quoted as saying in both the *National Post* and *Marketing* magazine:

I'm here today at a moment when I'm actually supposed to be with my colleagues in Ottawa at a caucus meeting, so if I tweet that I'll have a whole bunch of colleagues who say,

That's right, [the member for Papineau is] not sitting in this room right now. He's off in Toronto talking to ad folks.

Perhaps it was not on February 9. Perhaps he could clarify what date it was, but it was at Advertising Week 2011.

I am also happy to table evidence that the member received speaking payments from Speakers' Spotlight. I would like very simply to know if he could tell us what date he was speaking at ad week in Toronto, when he admitted that he ought to have been in caucus. And was he being paid to be working elsewhere when he admitted that he should have been here in Ottawa?

The Speaker: I would suggest that the member for Papineau and the Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism sit down and have a discussion and sort out the facts and then come back. I do not think it is a subject that needs to be debated in the House.

Points of Order

With great respect to both hon. members, the members are free to give speeches where they like, when they like. I do not think it is something that we need to be concerned with on a point of order in the House, interesting as it may be.

Mr. Robert Oliphant (Don Valley West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, in a similar vein, I am rising on a point of order regarding a statement made by the member for Nepean—Carleton, the Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister, during question period both yesterday and today.

In his comments, the member attempted to blur the lines between acceptable and unacceptable Elections Canada finance standards using the Don Valley West Federal Liberal Association as an example. This dates back to 2004. I believe he misled the House and I would like unanimous consent to table documents from Elections Canada that would clear up any misunderstanding about what may or may not have taken place in 2004.

I rise because this is critical. Everyone knows that this does not have anything to do with me; it has to do with the good people of Don Valley West and the hon. John Godfrey, a man of unimpeachable integrity. He has filed his candidate statement, as well as the returns for 2004. While these are public documents, apparently the parliamentary secretary does not understand how to read them.

Indeed, there was a transfer from the federal party, a legal transfer, that was then placed in the budget of the expenses of the campaign. It was duly reported and was under the limits. It was legal and publicly reported.

The Speaker: Does the hon. member have the unanimous consent of the House to table those documents?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

Mr. Pierre Poilievre (Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister and to the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member is referring to the \$5,000 transfer from the Liberal Party of Canada on July 9, 2004, from the national party to the local riding association of Don Valley West. The same \$5,000 was transferred back on July 15, 2004, just one week later.

The hon. member commented on the unimpeachable integrity of Mr. John Godfrey, who was then a member of Parliament. I am not rising to contest that integrity. In fact, I think that transaction was perfectly allowable under the elections laws, as were all of the transactions that were made by the Conservative Party, which were of an identical nature. I would also note that Elections Canada, and this is the key, allowed that transaction to be considered a local expense, not to count against the national spending limit of the Liberal Party.

Likewise, transactions of an identical nature from the Conservative Party and its local riding associations should be considered local expenses and not considered against—

Routine Proceedings

● (1510)

The Speaker: Order, please. I do not think there is a valid point of order here. It appears to be a debate. If hon. members are interested in having a debate, they can arrange a late night take note debate on this subject. I am sure it would be highly entertaining. I would invite them to consider that at the next House leaders' meeting.

* * *

BUSINESS OF SUPPLY

Hon. John Baird (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have three motions and I believe you would find unanimous consent for all three. First, I move:

That for the supply period ending March 26, Standing Order 81(5) be amended by replacing the words "three sitting days" with "one sitting day", provided that supplementary estimates be reported, or shall be deemed to have been reported, not later than 1 p.m. on the said sitting day; that 24 hours' written notice shall be given of a notice to restore or reinstate any item in the supplementary estimates.

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The 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)

* * *

FREEZING ASSETS OF CORRUPT REGIMES ACT

(Bill C-61. On the Order: Government Orders:)

March 8, 2011—Consideration at report stage of Bill C-61, An Act to provide for the taking of restrictive measures in respect of the property of officials and former officials of foreign states and of their family members—Minister of Foreign Affairs.

Hon. John Baird (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I move:

That, notwithstanding any Standing Order or usual practice of the House, Bill C-61, An Act to provide for the taking of restrictive measures in respect of the property of officials and former officials of foreign states and of their family members, be deemed concurred in at report stage and allowed to be called for the third reading stage later today; that, during the debate at the said stage, not more than one member from each recognized party may speak for not more than 10 minutes, after which the bill shall be deemed read a third time and passed.

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The 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, bill concurred in)

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ENHANCED NEW VETERANS CHARTER ACT

(Bill C-55. On the Order: Government Orders:)

March 8, 2011—Consideration at report stage of Bill C-55, An Act to amend the Canadian Forces Members and Veterans Re-establishment and Compensation Act and the Pension Act, and of Motions Nos. 1 and 2—Minister of Veterans Affairs and Minister of State (Agriculture)

Hon. John Baird (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I move:

That, notwithstanding any Standing Order or usual practice of the House, in relation to Bill C-55, An Act to amend the Canadian Forces Members and Veterans Re-establishment and Compensation Act and the Pension Act, the report stage motions in the name of the Minister of Veterans Affairs be deemed adopted and the bill deemed concurred in at report stage; that the bill be allowed to be called for the third reading stage later today; and that, during the debate at the said stage, not more than one member from each recognized party may speak for not more than 10 minutes, after which the bill shall be deemed read a third time and passed.

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The 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, Motions Nos. 1 and 2 agreed to and bill concurred in)

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

[English]

GOVERNMENT RESPONSE TO PETITIONS

Mr. Tom Lukiwski (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 36(8) I would be honoured to table, in both official languages, the government's response to 16 petitions.

* * *

INTERPARLIAMENTARY DELEGATIONS

Mr. Blaine Calkins (Wetaskiwin, CPC): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 34(1) I have the honour to present to the House, in both official languages, the following report of the Canadian NATO Parliamentary Association, NATO Parliamentary Assembly, respecting its participation at the Transatlantic Forum held in Washington, D.C., United States of America, from December 6-7, 2010.

● (1515)

Mr. Randy Hoback (Prince Albert, CPC): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 34(1), I have the honour to present, in both official languages, three reports of the Canadian section of the Inter-Parliamentary Forum of the Americas, FIPA, respecting participation at: the regional trade and knowledge workshop for parliamentarians of the Americas in Mexico City, Mexico, May 20-22, 2010; the 22nd FIPA executive committee meetings in Asuncion, Paraguay, June 5, 2010; and the meeting of the Group of Women Parliamentarians of the Americas in Quito, Ecuador, August 11-12, 2010.

Hon. John Baird: Mr. Speaker, my friend from Ottawa South was unsure what I said in the second motion I presented.

It was Bill C-61, an act to provide for the taking of restrictive measures. I just wanted to clarify that for him.

COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

ENVIRONMENT AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Mr. James Bezan (Selkirk—Interlake, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the sixth report of the Standing Committee on Environment and Sustainable Development in relation to the supplementary estimates (C), 2010-11.

* * *

RED TAPE REVIEW AND REDUCTION ACT

Hon. Navdeep Bains (Mississauga—Brampton South, Lib.) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-633, An Act to amend the Statutory Instruments Act (regulatory reduction).

He said: Mr. Speaker, I rise to present my bill entitled, An Act to amend the Statutory Instruments Act, which I will refer to by its short title, the Red Tape Review and Reduction Act.

This bill was created in response to a lack of meaningful action on the part of the Conservative government to actually tackle the problem of red tape facing our nation's small businesses. The bill is about changing the DNA, the culture of government and putting the concerns of small businesses at the heart of all regulatory decisions.

In short, the bill compels all regulation-making authorities to set annual reduction targets, and these targets are set by looking at how regulations affect the ability of Canadian businesses to compete domestically and in the global marketplace, consulting with stakeholders and other regulatory bodies and identifying regulations that can be eliminated.

The targets and their progress would then be reported to the government and to Parliament to ensure transparency and accountability.

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

* * *

CANADA ELECTIONS ACT

Mr. Don Davies (Vancouver Kingsway, NDP) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-634, An Act to amend the Canada Elections Act (voting age).

He said: Mr. Speaker, I rise to introduce a bill that would lower the voting age in federal elections to 16. I believe this is an important step that will improve democracy and civic participation in Canada.

The history of voting rights in Canada is one of making voting increasingly accessible. Initially, only property-owning males, 21 years or older were eligible. Over time, women, first nations and other minorities were included. The property requirement was scrapped and the voting age was lowered to 18.

I believe it is time for a serious debate about further broadening access to our most cherished democratic rights. We must note that young people pay taxes and are subject to federal laws and, therefore, they deserve a voice in government.

Too many Canadians choose not to vote and non-voting is epidemic amongst young people. Lowering the voting age to 16 would ensure that new voters are in high school in their first election.

Routine Proceedings

This would permit a reinvigorated civics education in our schools, making young people better aware of political issues, the impact on their lives and the importance of voter participation in our democracy.

We note that a number of other countries allow citizens to vote at 16, including Austria, Brazil and Nicaragua. I hope this bill spurs a much needed conversation about improving democracy and voter participation in Canada.

I seek the support of all my colleagues to add to that important democratic debate.

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

* * *

• (1520)

PETITIONS

ASBESTOS

Mr. Pat Martin (Winnipeg Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I rise today on behalf of thousands of Canadians who have presented a petition calling upon Parliament to take note that asbestos is the greatest industrial killer that the world has ever known, and yet Canada remains one of the world's largest producers and exporters of asbestos in the world, even though more Canadians now die from asbestos than all other industrial causes combined.

The petitioners also point out that Canada spends millions of dollars subsidizing the asbestos industry and blocking international efforts to curb its use. Therefore, the petitioners call upon Parliament to ban asbestos in all of its forms, institute a just transition program for asbestos workers and the communities in which they live, end all government subsidies of asbestos both in Canada and abroad, and stop blocking international health and safety conventions designed to protect workers from asbestos, such as the Rotterdam Convention.

[Translation]

HOUSING

Hon. Irwin Cotler (Mount Royal, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to present several petitions initiated by the Fédération des locataires d'habitations à loyer modique du Québec calling for funds to retrofit low income housing.

The petitioners point out that the 65,000 families living in low income housing in Quebec need the work done in order to improve their quality of life and that this work will protect the sustainability of housing stock worth more than \$7 billion, allow substantial energy savings and support local job creation in all regions of Quebec.

The petitioners are asking the Government of Canada to provide the public funds needed by the Société d'habitation du Québec to complete its renovation plan for low income housing, which includes covering an accumulated maintenance deficit.

Routine Proceedings

COPYRIGHT

Mr. Thierry St-Cyr (Jeanne-Le Ber, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I am honoured to present a petition signed by over 1,200 people in my riding alone, calling on all parliamentarians to amend Bill C-32 on copyright, to restore balance. In its current form, the bill inordinately benefits big business, to the detriment of our artists.

Some artists came to Ottawa in their tour buses. At the time, members of the opposition parties, including the Liberal Party, said they would support the artists' demands. Unfortunately, the leader of the Liberal Party has since withdrawn his support. He changed his mind. I hope this petition will convince him to go back to his original stand.

[*English*]

PENSIONS

Mr. John Rafferty (Thunder Bay—Rainy River, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to present a petition signed by hundreds and maybe thousands of Canadians right across the country.

The petitioners are calling on the government to affirm that pension benefits are in fact deferred wages, to elevate defined pension benefit plans to secured status in the Bankruptcy and Insolvency Act and in the Canadian Creditors Protection Act, and to pass into law any legislation before it that will achieve these objectives.

I will remind the House that Bill C-501 is a related piece of legislation that is coming up for a vote today.

[*Translation*]

EMPLOYMENT INSURANCE

Mr. Yves Lessard (Chambly—Borduas, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I want to present a petition from the people in my riding calling for changes to the employment insurance system, specifically with respect to the waiting period for obtaining the first employment insurance benefit cheque.

This serves as a reminder that the employment insurance system is not adapted to new realities, and the petitioners are inviting us to make the necessary changes.

• (1525)

SENIORS

Mr. Yves Lessard (Chambly—Borduas, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I want to present another petition, this one calling for improved benefits for seniors. It has been years since any changes were made to improve benefits for seniors, specifically the guaranteed income supplement. Also, a senior should be able to collect the pension of his or her deceased spouse.

The petitioners are calling on us to realize that there are many seniors in need. It is our duty to improve income support for seniors.

[*English*]

CHILD PORNOGRAPHY

Mr. Brian Murphy (Moncton—Riverview—Dieppe, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is my honour to present a petition to amend section 163 of the Criminal Code. Over 10,000 Canadians from across the

country signed this position. The petition was prepared by Canada Family Action.

Section 163 of the code refers to “child pornography”. These signatures are in support of changing that terminology to “child sex abuse materials”.

The citizens are calling on this chamber to get rid of legal terminology that is outdated, inaccurate and offensive because horrible sex abuse and assault are not to be classified as corrupting public morals under an antiquated and outdated section of the code.

It is time for the government to get down to business and change the archaic language in the now dated code and support the good citizens of Canada who have signed this petition in that regard.

CANADA-EUROPEAN TRADE AGREEMENT

Mr. Alex Atamanenko (British Columbia Southern Interior, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have a number of petitions.

The first three deal with the Canada-European trade agreement.

In the first petitioner, the petitioners feel this agreement could restrict or prohibit government from favouring local goods, services and local food. They are very concerned that it could contain UPOV-91 and other restrictions on farmers and citizens and their ability to save, reuse, select, exchange and sell seeds. They call upon Parliament to fully disclose the content of this agreement, including the text.

In the second petition on the Canada-European Union trade agreement, or CETA, the petitioners call upon the Government of Canada, provincial and territorial governments, to immediately cease negotiating with the EU, while the nation-wide public consultations have been held on how and whether or not to proceed with a potential trade agreement.

In the third petition dealing with the CETA, the petitioners call upon the Government of Canada to conduct formal, open and transparent consultation with Canadians and get prior informed consent on pursuing a trade agreement with the European Union based on fair trade that protects the democratic rights of Canadian and European Union citizens.

There are around 200 people who signed those petitions.

HARMONIZED SALES TAX

Mr. Alex Atamanenko (British Columbia Southern Interior, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the fourth petition calls on the federal government and the province of British Columbia to rescind the HST at a time when many Canadians are struggling to pay their bills.

Routine Proceedings

POVERTY

Mr. Alex Atamanenko (British Columbia Southern Interior, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the fifth petition deals with Bill C-545. The petition states that Canada ranks far behind most other developed countries in the extent of poverty among working-age adults and children.

The petitioners call upon Parliament to ensure swift passage of Bill C-545, An Act to Eliminate Poverty in Canada.

ANIMAL WELFARE

Mr. Alex Atamanenko (British Columbia Southern Interior, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the next petition deals with animal transportation regulations.

The petitioners call upon the House of Commons to amend the animal transportation regulations under Canada's Health of Animals Act to be consistent with the findings of the EU scientific committee on animal health and welfare to reduce transport time for pigs, poultry, horses, cows and lambs to eight hours and twelve hours for cattle, sheep and goats and to ensure adequate enforcement of the regulations.

The last petition calls for support of my bill, Bill C-544, An Act to amend the Health of Animals Act and the Meat Inspection Act (slaughter of horses for human consumption), thus prohibiting the importation or exportation of horses for slaughter for human consumption as well as horse meat products for human consumption.

PROTECTION OF HUMAN LIFE

Mr. Leon Benoit (Vegreville—Wainwright, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to present a petition on behalf of constituents who note that Canada is a country which respects human rights. In fact, the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms protects everyone's right to life.

The petitioners have noted that, since 1988, Canada has had no law whatsoever to protect the lives of unborn children. They call upon Parliament to enact legislation to protect human life from conception until natural death.

[*Translation*]

AIR CANADA

Mr. Michel Guimond (Montmorency—Charlevoix—Haute-Côte-Nord, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to present a petition with close to 1,000 signatures of employees at Air Canada's maintenance and overhaul centres. Three-quarters of these employees work in Montreal and the remaining quarter work in Winnipeg, Manitoba. These petitioners are calling upon the Minister of Finance to uphold the Air Canada Public Participation Act, which was passed in 1988 when Air Canada was privatized.

You will recall, Mr. Speaker, since you were a member of Parliament at that time, that this act provides for full compliance with the Official Languages Act, a head office in the Montreal urban community and three maintenance and overhaul centres in the Montreal urban community, Mississauga and Winnipeg. Recently, Air Canada sold its maintenance services. Now, 4,500 well-paid jobs, with average salaries of \$60,000, and approximately 23,000 indirect jobs may be transferred to El Salvador. The government must take responsibility.

● (1530)

[*English*]

ANIMAL WELFARE

Mr. Francis Valeriote (Guelph, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, on behalf of 280 more people in the riding of Guelph, I am presenting a petition calling on the federal government to bring forward and adopt Bill C-544.

The petitioners draw the attention of members of the House to the fact that Canadian horse meat products currently being sold for human consumption in domestic and international markets are likely to contain drugs that are strictly prohibited from being used in all other food-producing animals destined for the human food supply chain.

Thus, to protect the security of our food supply and to protect the health and safety of humans, the petitioners call upon the House to adopt Bill C-544, An Act to amend the Health of Animals Act and the Meat Inspection Act (slaughter of horses for human consumption) to prohibit the importation or exportation of horses, as well as horse meat products, for slaughter for human consumption.

[*Translation*]

DEMOCRATIC REPRESENTATION

Ms. Christiane Gagnon (Québec, BQ): Mr. Speaker, today I am presenting a petition signed by 168 Quebecers who refuse to see Quebec's weight in this House reduced. I presented this same petition before on November 29, 2010, with 143 signatures.

We know that the Conservative government introduced Bill C-12 to increase the number of seats in the House from 308 to 338. These new seats will go to British Columbia, Alberta and Ontario. If this happens, Quebec's weight will be reduced from 24% to 22%. We know that in 1867 Quebec's weight was 36%. Quebec was recognized as a nation by this House, but now the government is going in the opposite direction. Clearly, this is one way to muzzle our nation and also to fight the Bloc Québécois, because this is the only way this government has found to try to secure a majority.

The purpose of this bill is to increase the number of seats in provinces where the Conservatives hope to gain political advantage. The petitioners are therefore asking that a minimum representation threshold of 25% of seats be set for Quebec so that our nation is adequately represented.

[*English*]

MULTIPLE SCLEROSIS

Ms. Kirsty Duncan (Etobicoke North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to present yet another petition on chronic cerebrospinal venous insufficiency, or CCSVI.

Speaker's Ruling

Last week I was honoured to be asked to speak at an international scientific conference on CCSVI. We need evidence-based medicine in Canada and new evidence from Jordan, India, Scotland and Slovenia replicate results from Bulgaria, Canada, Italy, Kuwait and the United States.

Twelve thousand, five hundred liberation procedures have been undertaken worldwide, yet Canadian patients are told to wait for seven correlational studies in the planning stage. Last week correlation was demonstrated over and over.

The petitioners therefore are calling for clinical trials with diagnosis, treatment and follow-up in Canada.

[*Translation*]

AIR CANADA

Mr. Luc Desnoyers (Rivière-des-Mille-Îles, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present three petitions with 250 names, signed by Air Canada workers. As you know, Air Canada is preparing to outsource jobs at its maintenance centres in Montreal, Winnipeg and Mississauga and to eventually transfer the centres to El Salvador. Thousands of jobs are in jeopardy: 4,500 direct jobs and 23,000 indirect jobs. These people are calling on the Minister of Finance, who has responsibility for the Air Canada Public Participation Act, to ensure once and for all that these jobs remain in Canada.

[*English*]

CHILD PORNOGRAPHY

Mrs. Carol Hughes (Algoma—Manitoulin—Kapuskaing, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am honoured to table a petition signed by hundreds of Elliot Lake residents. These constituents support the group Canadians Addressing Sexual Exploitation.

Child pornography is clearly reprehensible. The sad fact is that with emerging technologies, there are more opportunities than ever to acquire it. There is no place in our society for child pornography. It is not a victimless crime. It derails lives and destabilizes families and communities.

These petitioners note that the creation, use and circulation of child pornography is condemned by a clear majority of Canadians. They call upon Parliament to protect our children by taking all necessary steps to stop the Internet as a medium for the distribution of child victimization pornography.

• (1535)

The Speaker: The 15 minutes allotted for presentation of petitions has now expired.

* * *

QUESTIONS ON THE ORDER PAPER

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

The Speaker: Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

MOTIONS FOR PAPERS

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

The Speaker: Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

* * *

PRIVILEGE

STANDING COMMITTEE ON FINANCE—SPEAKER'S RULING

The Speaker: I am now prepared to rule on the question of privilege raised on February 7, 2011, by the hon. member for Kings—Hants concerning the production of documents ordered by the Standing Committee on Finance.

[*Translation*]

I would like to thank the hon. member for Kings—Hants for having raised this matter, as well as the hon. Parliamentary Secretary to the Government House Leader, and the members for Mississauga South, Windsor—Tecumseh and Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine for their interventions.

[*English*]

The member for Kings—Hants explained that on November 17, 2010, the Standing Committee on Finance adopted a motion ordering the production of documents relating to corporate profits and taxes and the costs of various justice bills. The government, citing cabinet confidence as a reason, declined on three separate occasions to produce the information sought. The committee then presented its 10th report to the House on February 7, 2011, to draw the attention of the House to this matter.

More specifically, the member for Kings—Hants contended that the refusal to provide the information constituted a breach of this House's privileges and, moreover, the refusal to provide a reasonable explanation as to why the information was deemed to constitute a cabinet confidence was tantamount to contempt.

There was a considerable lapse of time before the government formally responded to this question of privilege. Before it did so on February 17, 2011, in the *Debates*, at page 8324, the government House leader rose in the House to table “information on our government's low-cost and tough-on-crime agenda as requested by certain members of Parliament”.

Only after this, on February 28, 2011, did the parliamentary secretary to the government House leader returned to the House to present his case on the question of privilege. He argued that even though, in his view, the Standing Committee on Finance, in its 10th report, did not ask the House to order the production of the documents in question, the government, despite the absence of such a House order, had willingly tabled information which preserved “the confidentiality required around documents which are classified as cabinet confidences yet meets the request for specific data contained within the documents which by its nature is not a cabinet confidence”.

Later the same day, the member for Kings—Hants made further arguments in the House to indicate his dissatisfaction with the government's response. He stated that he believed the government had “failed both to provide all the documents or provide any reasonable explanation as to why these documents cannot be provided”.

[Translation]

In interventions since that time, the government has maintained that the government has provided the information requested, implying that all of it has been provided.

It should be noted that at the same time as interventions being made on this question of privilege, the House was proceeding on a separate track on what was essentially the same matter.

Thus, on February 17, 2011, the House was debating an opposition motion ordering the production of the same documents demanded by the Standing Committee on Finance. In a subsequent vote on the motion, held on February 28, 2011, the House adopted the motion, thus setting a deadline of March 7, 2011 for the production of the documents in question.

[English]

Dealing first with the question of whether or not the House or its committees have the authority to order the production of documents, let me restate in part my April 27, 2010, ruling with respect to the production of documents related to Afghan detainees.

At the time I stated, at page 2043 of the *Debates*:

—procedural authorities are categorical in repeatedly asserting the powers of the House in ordering the production of documents. No exceptions are made for any category of government documents...Therefore, the Chair must conclude that it is perfectly within the existing privileges of the House to order production of the documents in question.

[Translation]

I also quoted *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, second edition, at pages 978 and 979, which states:

The Standing Orders do not delimit the power to order the production of papers and records. The result is a broad, absolute power that on the surface appears to be without restriction. There is no limit on the type of papers likely to be requested, the only prerequisite is that the papers exist—in hard copy or electronic format—and that they are located in Canada....

No statute or practice diminishes the fullness of the power rooted in the House privileges unless there is an explicit legal provision to that effect, or unless the House adopts a specific resolution limiting the power. The House has never set a limit on its power to order the production of papers and records.

With respect to the power of committees to order the production of documents, Standing Order 108(1)(a) is clear, that they can “...send for persons, papers and records...” O’Brien and Bosc, at page 978, expands on this point:

The Standing Orders state that standing committees have the power to order the production of papers and records, another privilege rooted in the Constitution that is delegated by the House....

● (1540)

[English]

Thus, the power of committees of the House to order papers is indistinguishable from that of the House.

Speaker's Ruling

With these well-established privileges and principles in mind, and in order to assess properly whether or not the order flowing from the Standing Committee on Finance has been complied with, I undertook a review of what was tabled. The Chair was helped in this by the committee's order, which was quite explicit in the information it sought, even going so far as to list the bills for which information was required. While the Chair does not judge the quality of documents tabled in the House, it is clear from a cursory examination of the material tabled that, on its face, it does not provide all the information ordered by the committee.

While the Chair finds this in and of itself unsettling, what is of greater concern is the absence of an explanation for the omissions. At the very least, based on the indisputable right of the committee to order these documents, this is required. Only then can the House determine whether the reasons given are sufficient or satisfactory. The need to provide reasons to the House is clear. On page 281 of Bourinot's *Parliamentary Procedure and Practice in the Dominion of Canada*, fourth edition, it states:

[Translation]

But it must be remembered that under all circumstances it is for the house to consider whether the reasons given for refusing the information are sufficient. The right of Parliament to obtain every possible information on public questions is undoubted, and the circumstances must be exceptional, and the reasons very cogent, when it cannot be at once laid before the houses.

[English]

The Chair has reviewed the debates on this question, and while initially cabinet confidence was cited as a reason not to produce any of the documents, despite this, the government saw fit to partially comply with the committee order and a tabling of some material did eventually take place. Since then, no further reasons have been given as to why the balance of the documents should not or will not be tabled.

It may be that valid reasons exist. That is not for the Chair to judge. A committee empowered to investigate the matter might, but the Chair is ill-equipped to do so. However, there is no doubt that an order to produce documents is not being fully complied with, and this is a serious matter that goes to the heart of the House's undoubted role in holding the government to account.

For these reasons, the Chair finds that there are sufficient grounds for finding a *prima facie* question of privilege in this matter.

Before I invite the member for Kings—Hants to move his motion, however, the Chair wishes to explain the procedural parameters that govern such motions.

House of Commons Procedure and Practice, second edition, at pages 146 and 147 states:

In cases where the motion is not known in advance, the Speaker may provide assistance to the Member if the terms of the proposed motion are substantially different from the matter originally raised. The Speaker would be reluctant to allow a matter as important as a privilege motion to fail on the ground of improper form. The terms of the motion have generally provided that the matter be referred to committee for study or have been amended to that effect.

Speaker's Ruling

I hasten to add that the powers of the Speaker in these matters are robust and well known. In 1966, Mr. Speaker Lamoureux, having come to a finding of *prima facie* privilege on a matter ruled a number of motions out of order. As *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, second edition, tells us at page 147, footnote 371, in doing so, Mr. Speaker Lamoureux “more than once pointed out that it was Canadian practice to refer such matters to committee for study and suggested that this should be the avenue pursued”.

The Chair is of course aware of exceptions to this practice, but in most if not all of these cases, circumstances were such that a deviation from the normal practice was deemed acceptable, or there was a unanimous desire on the part of the House to proceed in that fashion.

With this guidance in mind, I will soon recognize the hon. member for Kings—Hants so that he can propose his motion, but before he proceeds, I have a ruling on another matter, which I will deliver.

• (1545)

STATEMENTS BY MINISTER OF INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION
REGARDING KAIROS—SPEAKER'S RULING

The Speaker: I am now prepared to rule on the question of privilege raised on February 17, 2011, by the hon. member for Scarborough—Guildwood, stemming from the presentation of the sixth report of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development, and the allegedly misleading statements made by the Minister of International Cooperation.

[*Translation*]

I would like to thank the member for Scarborough—Guildwood, as well as the hon. Parliamentary Secretary to the Government House Leader, and the members for Ottawa Centre, Joliette, Scarborough—Rouge River, Vancouver East, Guelph, Eglinton—Lawrence, Beaches—East York, Yukon and Winnipeg North for their contributions on this important matter.

[*English*]

As members will know, this matter was first raised by the member for Scarborough—Guildwood on December 13, 2010. In my ruling of February 10, 2011, I explained that I was unable to “find evidence in documents properly before the House to suggest that the minister's statements to the House were deliberately misleading”. Accordingly, I declined to find that a *prima facie* question of privilege existed.

On February 14, 2011, the Minister of International Cooperation made a statement in the House to clarify matters related to the funding application for KAIROS. While acknowledging that the way in which this case has been handled was unfortunate, she asserted that she had neither intentionally nor knowingly misled the House or the committee. She also stated that:

If some were led to conclude that my language implied that the department and I were of one mind on this application, then I apologize.

[*Translation*]

On February 17, 2011, the Sixth Report of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Development was presented to the House. It is a short report which focuses primarily on testimony by the minister and her officials on December 9, 2010,

in relation to the process that led to the rejection of a funding application by KAIROS.

In particular, much attention is given to determining how the word “not” made its way into the assessment of the KAIROS funding application submitted to the minister for approval. The last part of the report links this testimony with “other information before the House” and draws “attention to what appears to be a possible breach of privilege”.

[*English*]

The member for Scarborough—Guildwood and other members have argued that the minister has made statements in committee that are different from those made in the House or provided to the House in written form. Indeed, these members have argued that the material available shows that contradictory information has been provided. As a result, they argue, this demonstrates that the minister has deliberately misled the House and that as such, a *prima facie* case of privilege exists.

For his part, the Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons argued that the sixth report of the standing committee contained no accusations or other suggestions that the rights or dignity of the House had been compromised or that the committee had been misled, either unintentionally or deliberately. Claiming that in fact no direct accusation had been made, he asked, “What charge is there to be answered?” He suggested that it was improper for a committee to report that “an undescribed and undefined breach of privilege may have occurred”, and emphasized that the minister had given clear, accurate and honest answers. He also stated that it was not contradictory for the minister to state that while she did not know who inserted the word “not”, it had indeed been done on her instructions.

[*Translation*]

Now that the standing committee, in its sixth report, has made available to the House material not previously before us, I must take its findings into consideration, measuring them against other material, including statements in the House and answers to oral and written questions.

But I caution that the Speaker has a very particular and limited role in the conclusions to be drawn. In a ruling given on March 21, 1978, at page 3975 of *Debates*, which is also referred to in Maingot's *Parliamentary Privilege in Canada*, second edition, at page 227, Mr. Speaker Jerome quoted a British procedure committee report of 1967, which states in part:

• (1550)

[*English*]

—the Speaker should ask himself, when he has to decide whether to grant precedence over other public business to a motion which a Member who has complained of some act or conduct as constituting a breach of privilege desires to move, should be not—do I consider that, assuming that the facts are as stated, the act or conduct constitutes a breach of privilege, but could it reasonably be held to be a breach of privilege, or to put it shortly, has the Member an arguable point? If the Speaker feels any doubt on the question, he should, in my view, leave it to the House.

Privilege

[Translation]

It is with this principle in mind that I have taken great care to study the evidence in view of the very serious allegations regarding the conduct of a minister, who as a result has been subjected to harsh and public criticism which has been potentially damaging to her reputation.

[English]

The crux of the matter, it seems to me, is this: as the committee has reported, when asked who inserted the word “not” in the assessment of the KAIROS funding application, in testimony the minister twice replied that she did not know. In a February 14 statement to the House, while she did not indicate that she knew who inserted the word “not”, the minister addressed this matter by stating that the “not” was inserted at her direction. At the very least, it can be said that this has caused confusion. The minister has acknowledged this, and has characterized her own handling of the matter as “unfortunate”. Yet as is evident from hearing the various interventions that have been made since then, the confusion persists. As the member for Scarborough—Rouge River told the House, this “has confused me. It has confused Parliament. It has confused us in our exercise of holding the government to account, whether it is the Privy Council, whether it is the minister, whether it is public officials; we cannot do our job when there is that type of confusion”.

The Chair has faced a somewhat analogous situation before. In January 2002 the Minister of National Defence had made statements in the House regarding Afghan detainees that ultimately also caused confusion and led to a question of privilege being raised. In that case, two versions of events had been presented to the House. In that case, as in this one, the minister assured the House that there was no intention to mislead. At that time, in finding a *prima facie* case, I stated at page 8581 of the *Debates* of February 1, 2002, that I was “prepared as I must be to accept the minister’s assertion that he had no intention to mislead the House. Nevertheless this remains a very difficult situation”. I then went on to conclude that “the situation before us where the House is left with two versions of events is one that merits further consideration by an appropriate committee, if only to clear the air”.

In keeping with this fairly recent precedent, and mindful of the ruling by Mr. Speaker Jerome cited earlier, the Chair is of the view that sufficient doubt exists to warrant a finding of *prima facie* privilege in this case. Accordingly, I will invite the member for Scarborough—Guildwood to move his motion in due course, but at the moment I will return to the hon. member for Kings—Hants to move his motion on the earlier case.

REFERENCE TO STANDING COMMITTEE ON PROCEDURE AND HOUSE AFFAIRS

Hon. Scott Brison (Kings—Hants, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I move:

That, given your finding that a *prima facie* breach of the privileges of Parliament has been committed by the government for failing to fully provide the documents as ordered by the House, the matter be hereby referred to the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs for a final determination on the government’s compliance, or lack thereof, and that the committee report back its findings and recommendations no later than March 21, 2011.

● (1555)

Mr. Speaker, I want to begin my remarks by thanking you for your very thoughtful and considerate ruling on this issue of Parliament’s right to information. As you know, what is at stake here is nothing less than Parliament’s ability to function and hold the government accountable.

Parliamentarians have ordered the Conservative government to provide documents detailing the costs of its U.S.-style prison agenda. Parliament has a right to these documents, as has been pointed out. We need this information to do our jobs as members of Parliament. Under the Canadian rule of law, it is the role of government to propose legislation and the role of Parliament to evaluate that legislation and control the government’s purse strings, for in our democracy it is Parliament that has the supreme authority over government spending and as parliamentarians we have a fiduciary obligation to Canadians.

When a constituent asks us how much this legislation just voted for actually costs, we have a moral responsibility and a parliamentary obligation to be able to answer that question. This applies to all members of Parliament, including Conservative members. It is important to note that not only is the government keeping opposition members in the dark as to the cost of its legislation, it is also keeping its own Conservative members of Parliament in the dark.

No one should be complicit in helping the government keep Canadians in the dark. As members of Parliament, it is our duty to thoroughly and publicly evaluate the government’s spending plans before allowing the government to spend that money. It is our job to make sure that when the government spends Canadians’ hard-earned tax dollars, it is done with respect, transparency and in a way that reflects the priorities of Canadians. That is what Canadians elect us to do. That is why we are here. However, without information, we as members of Parliament simply cannot do our jobs.

We live in a wonderful country, but one that is also facing some very serious and complex challenges. As parliamentarians, we must work to manage these challenges. We have a rapidly aging population with growing demands for health care and other government programs. We have a dwindling tax base due to a demographic shift, a dwindling tax base to pay for those services.

Canadians are worried about their pensions and savings and at the same time Canadians are facing dangerous levels of personal debt. Too many simply cannot afford to retire and too many seniors who have retired are living in poverty. Canadian families from coast to coast are struggling to make ends meet. They face rising food prices and other increasing costs of living.

Although the Canadian economy has had a statistical recovery, we are still facing a human recession. For far too many Canadians, full-time jobs have been replaced by part-time work. Our constituents want the government to invest in health care, family care, education, retraining and pensions. At the same time, they want the Conservatives to be held to account because it is the Conservatives who have spent Canada into a record \$56 billion deficit.

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Therefore, as parliamentarians we must evaluate all of these competing demands for tax dollars while we put Canada back on a path toward balanced budgets, but we cannot make informed decisions between these competing demands if we do not know how much the government's legislation would cost.

In June of last year, the Parliamentary Budget Officer released a report on how much the Conservatives' truth in sentencing act would cost Canadian taxpayers. He estimated the cost at \$1 billion a year for the federal government and, on top of that, more than \$1 billion a year in costs for provinces. That is more than \$2 billion of Canadian taxpayers' dollars each and every year, which must now go toward building prisons instead of providing hospital beds and hiring nurses.

This is despite the fact that the minister has told us this legislation would only cost \$90 million over two years. The \$2 billion annual price tag is just one of the Conservatives' crime bills. The Standing Committee on Finance responded to this new information by ordering the government to provide the committee with detailed cost estimates for 18 additional Conservative criminal justice bills.

● (1600)

For each crime bill, the committee ordered the government to provide a breakdown of incremental cost estimates; a breakdown of baseline departmental funding requirements, excluding the impacts of the bills; the total departmental annual reference levels; and, a detailed cost accounting analysis and projections, including assumptions for each of the crime bills conducted in accordance with the Treasury Board guide to costing.

We have asked for these detailed cost breakdowns because Canadians have a right to know and we have a responsibility as parliamentarians to demand.

How much would these crime bills cost? How much does the government plan to pay? Do the Conservatives plan to reallocate existing money within the department? For example, are we going to see cuts to front-line policing and disaster relief in order to pay for bigger prisons, or does the government plan to find the money elsewhere through cuts to health care or education?

The Conservative government still refuses to provide Parliament with these cost breakdowns. The Conservatives continue to falsely hide behind cabinet confidence without even trying to provide an explanation as to why they believe cabinet confidence applies. They will not provide any explanation because they know their excuses are without merit. By hiding this information, the Conservatives are treating Parliament and indeed all Canadians with contempt.

On February 25, 2011, the Parliamentary Budget Officer published a report evaluating the government's response to the finance committee's request for information on the cost of the 18 crime bills. The PBO report states clearly that the Government of Canada has not provided the finance committee with most of the information that it requested.

In that report, the PBO recognizes that Parliament has a right to the information that has been requested and the report states clearly that this information is, "required for parliamentarians to fulfill fiduciary obligations under the Constitution".

However, the Conservative government refuses to respect the rules and provide the documents on how much the crime bills would cost.

The government did give us the bare bones annual cost for five of the 18 crime bills, but that is it. The government did not provide us with any cost breakdowns, as requested. The government did not provide the baseline departmental funding requirements that were requested. The government did not provide the total departmental annual reference levels that were requested. The government did not provide the detailed cost analysis required by Treasury Board that was requested by the committee. Nor did the government provide any reasonable explanation as to why none of this information could be provided.

This pathetic response from the government is an affront to Parliament and an insult to Canadians. The government is demonstrating contempt of Parliament and disrespect to taxpayers.

We know from the Parliamentary Budget Officer that the financial cost of these bills is in the billions of dollars. We know it is big, but we do not know how big.

As parliamentarians, we find ourselves in the situation where we cannot determine how seriously these crime bills would impact the federal treasury. We cannot make informed decisions between competing demands for money. We do not know how many hospital beds we will be able to afford in the future because we do not know how many prisons the government has effectively committed to build as a result of this legislation. Simply put, we do not have the basic information we need to evaluate the government's books and the government will not explain why it will not provide the documents to Parliament.

Either the government is breaking the rules in order to hide the true costs of its crime legislation from Canadians, or it is a matter of extreme incompetence where the government broke the rules in the first place by never bothering to actually find out how much the crime bills would cost. This is particularly unacceptable at a time when we have a record \$56 billion Conservative deficit. Either way, it is clear that the government has broken the rules and is in contempt of Parliament.

Once again, accordingly, and given the finding that a *prima facie* breach of the privileges of Parliament has been committed by the government for failing to provide the documents as ordered by the House, we ask that the matter be referred to the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs for a final determination on the government's compliance, or lack thereof, and that the committee report its findings and recommendations back to the House no later than March 21, 2011.

● (1605)

Mr. Tom Lukiwski (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I simply want to suggest that the government believed that the information we provided would satisfy the members opposite in their desire to find information as to the cost of our crime bills, our law and order bills.

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However, one thing needs to be discussed here and I hope it is something that would be acceptable to all members. We need to respect, in all cases, cabinet confidence. I know the member for Kings—Hants has argued that a previous government, the previous Liberal government, had released cabinet confidence when requested by the House.

However, Mr. Speaker, I think you would find, historically, that is not the case.

There needs to be respect for cabinet and respect for the information discussed in cabinet. That is fundamental to our democracy. While I can appreciate the member wanting information that would satisfy he and his committee members in trying to determine absolute costs, the member also needs to respect cabinet confidence.

We respect the decision by the Chair, obviously, and we are not challenging that. However, does my hon. colleague believe that cabinet confidence is fundamental to the democracy of Canadian government?

Hon. Scott Brison: Mr. Speaker, of course I believe that cabinet confidence is important but it is important that it be used where it really matters and is required.

However, once the decision had been made by a cabinet to bring government legislation to this House, the cost of a government's legislation is no longer cabinet confidence. In fact, once it comes to this House, there is a constitutional requirement, a fiduciary requirement, that parliamentarians need to have the cost of that legislation.

While the cabinet is discussing its legislation, that may be cabinet confidence, but once the government has presented its legislation to this House, it is obligated, under the Constitution, to provide this House and members of Parliament with the costs of that legislation.

Mr. Speaker, as I discussed earlier, we need to make decisions on behalf of Canadian citizens, on behalf of Canadian taxpayers, as to how to spend their money. We have a fundamental responsibility and obligation as parliamentarians to hold the government to account. It is not just opposition members. Conservative members have the same responsibility to hold their government to account. They should be standing and demanding that their government tells them the cost of its legislation.

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to hear my colleague from Kings—Hants agree with me that there is such a concept as cabinet confidence.

However, I think it is important to realize, again, as I pointed out in my earlier intervention to his original point of privilege, that cabinet confidence has to be respected in Parliament. What the member is talking about now, though, is information that he needs and his colleagues need in committee to determine whether legislation brought forward by this government is actually not only affordable to the Canadian public but necessary.

I would point out that prior to the decision today, the government provided that information to the opposition. In other words, as I pointed out in my intervention, we provided the information contained within the documents but not the documents themselves.

My question for the member opposition was not whether or not information was or was not provided. It has been clear that information has been provided. My question was whether documents that are considered to be cabinet confidence should have the ability to be protected by confidence, not turned over at the sheer desire of an opposition that may be doing it for strictly partisan purposes.

The question I asked dealt with information versus documents and I did not hear a distinct answer to that question.

• (1610)

Hon. Scott Brison: Mr. Speaker, I am not certain where the parliamentary secretary was during the Speaker's ruling earlier today, but if he had been listening he would have heard quite clearly that the Speaker did not agree with the government's position on this.

The Speaker found that there was a prima facie breach of the privileges of Parliament in this case. The Speaker condemned the government's failure to provide all of the information. The Speaker was very clear in his ruling that the government had not provided all of the information requested by Parliament, by the finance committee. In fact, the Speaker went further to say that the government had not provided adequate reasons for not providing the information sought.

Furthermore, the independent Parliamentary Budget Officer said that the Government of Canada "has not provided FINA with most of the information that it requested" and that it has not provided Parliament with any legitimate explanation as to why it has not fulfilled those requests for information.

I disagree completely with the government's abuse of the term "cabinet confidence", which does not apply to the costs of government legislation once it is introduced in the House. That parliamentary secretary either does not understand the principle of cabinet confidence or he does not understand the principle of respecting Parliament.

Mr. Garry Breitkreuz (Yorkton—Melville, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I find the position of the member opposite quite disingenuous. I have been in this House for quite some time and I have had a lot of experience with the Liberal government and what it did.

The member is very familiar with Bill C-68. I put in over 500 access to information requests and many of those were on the cost of that legislation. I have file cabinets full of documents where cabinet confidence was cited as the reason the Liberals would not let me know what the costs were.

I started piecing these all together and I realized that the cost was over \$1 billion. The government constantly denied that but used cabinet confidence as the excuse not to reveal the costs to me. Later on, the Auditor General confirmed that I was correct when I cited the fact that the cost was over \$1 billion.

That member is being very disingenuous when he says that his government did not use cabinet confidence in hiding costs.

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Hon. Scott Brison: Mr. Speaker, I fear that once again that hon. member was not in the House for your ruling earlier today in which you clearly stated that the government had not fulfilled its constitutional responsibility to provide Parliament with the information requested by the finance committee. Your judgment, Mr. Speaker, was that the government was in breach and that there was a prima facie case of privilege.

As the parliamentary secretary said earlier, the Liberals did respect cabinet confidence but at the same time we made information available to Parliament that was not protected under cabinet confidence. Liberal governments did do that. There was a higher level of transparency under Liberal governments than under the present Conservative government. In fact, there has been no government in the history of Canada as disrespectful of Parliament as the present Conservative government.

I believe the hon. member was elected initially as a Reform Party member. The principles upon which the Reform Party was founded in terms of respect for Parliament and democracy have been ripped to shreds by the current neo-conservative government that has no respect for Parliament whatsoever. Not only has the Conservative Prime Minister chewed up and spat out on the sidewalk of Canadian democracy the Progressive Conservative Party, he is doing the same to the roots, the cause, the basic fundamentals of the old Reform Party when it came to respect for Parliament.

I would think that hon. member, as a former Reform member, would be demanding a greater level of accountability from the present Conservative Prime Minister and not be so compliant with the Conservative Prime Minister's disrespect for Parliament.

• (1615)

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: Mr. Speaker, I will be brief. We want to thank the Chair and the Speaker for his ruling today. Rather than taking up valuable time in the House on this matter, I look forward to the committee considering this motion and reporting back to the House at its earliest opportunity.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre Paquette (Joliette, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I, too, will be brief. The Speaker's ruling says it all, especially when he states, as he did in April 2010, that committees, like the House, have the right to order the production of documents needed for their work.

It is appalling to see that the government did not learn its lesson last April. Once again, not only did it try to keep members of the Standing Committee on Finance from having access to all of the information they needed to do their work, but it tried to cover up this attempt at non-transparency by tabling documents in the House that in no way answered the members' request. That was like adding insult to injury. So I think that the ruling is welcome.

We will be supporting the Liberal member's motion. We hope that the government will agree to work democratically with the committee. My colleague from Outremont could testify to the fact that over the past few days we have seen the Conservatives use every kind of delaying tactic, including filibustering, to keep committees from coming to conclusions.

I invite the government to take note of the ruling by the Speaker of the House and to commit to working with us so that a report can be tabled by the deadline set out in the motion, namely April 21.

The Bloc Québécois will support the motion that was moved following the Speaker's ruling on the question of privilege.

Mr. Thomas Mulcair (Outremont, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the NDP will be supporting the motion by the member for Kings—Hants.

Like him, I am a member of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Finance, and like him, I was outraged at the Conservative government's attempts to hide behind the false argument of cabinet confidence.

Just as the member for Kings—Hants was a minister, I was a minister for a number of years in the National Assembly of Quebec, which has the same strict parliamentary rules for cabinet discussions. However, in this case, it is completely beside the point.

[*English*]

We often make the mistake of taking our institutions for granted. Today's courageous decision was made by a Speaker who has sat in the chair for longer than any other Speaker in Canadian history and who is such a unanimous choice that he has now served twice under a government led by a party other than his own. That is the quality of the Speaker we have.

In his courageous decision today, he again stood up for the defence of our institutions, as he did before Christmas, when it was revealed that the staffer of a Conservative member of Parliament, for his own purposes, sent out a confidential report of the same finance committee to a bunch of lobbyists to curry favour with them. That issue was also declared to be a question of confidence, and it is now before another committee. I cannot say more about that.

However, this is a pattern of behaviour that we are starting to see on the part of the Conservatives, a pattern of behaviour that seeks to undermine, to suborn and to damage our parliamentary institutions. With brazen arrogance, they replied that they no longer had to tell Parliament how much things would cost. One of the basic rules of the House is that we get to decide how money is spent. That is one of the most basic things we do here.

The government has the obligation to provide Parliament with information. The hypocrisy of this is the Conservatives were the ones who boasted they would bring in more accountability. They said that they would create an independent authority called the Parliamentary Budget Officer. They shackled him once by saying that he was a subaltern of the parliamentary librarian. Then we found out he was not even going to be able to get his full budget, so he could not hold on to his best staff. Then we found out that, like us, he could not even have access to real information that would allow members of Parliament to do their jobs. This is all about that.

This is about allowing Parliament to perform one of its most fundamental roles: holding the government to account in terms of how it spends public money.

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It is not the first time we have seen the Conservatives behave like this, but it is becoming a pattern of behaviour and it is time for the members of the House to stand up to the Conservatives and say “enough”, that they are not going to trammel on our obligations and rights or our ability to get our jobs done in the public interest anymore. This is a fundamental role of Parliament and our democracy.

We again congratulate the member for Kings—Hants for bringing the motion and the Speaker for his courageous ruling. The NDP will be there four square voting for it and working on it to try to have the rights of this institution respected by the Conservative government.

● (1620)

Mr. Wayne Marston (Hamilton East—Stoney Creek, NDP): Mr. Speaker, when I go back to my riding, the constituents who talk to me at Tim Hortons and other places are very concerned with the fact that Parliament cannot make proper value judgments on the expenditures and plans and perhaps even the upcoming budget because of the fact that the government seems to be becoming more and more secretive and protective.

We all know that democracy is a very fragile thing. I believe if this type of behaviour is condoned, it can set our country back dozens, if not hundreds of years. There is a very clear problem. This should never become a country governed by a sovereign or secretive body of some sort, and we see more and more of that by the government.

How does the member see that impacting on our democracy?

Mr. Thomas Mulcair: Mr. Speaker, the member could not have said it better. This goes right to the heart of the ability of this institution to work in the public's interest. The people he is referring to at the local Tim Hortons are the people who are expecting their parliamentarians to check on how their tax dollars are being spent.

The government would not provide the basic information to allow us to make a judgment and the member for Kings—Hants brought this motion. I sit on the same committee as he does and this is repeat behaviour. When Conservative staffers are not leaking out confidential prebudget consultation documents, they are trying to bar us from seeing what we need to do our jobs.

It turned out that this year the finance committee was not even able to table its prebudget recommendations because of the behaviour of the Conservatives. It is the same thing now. They are trying to shackle us and stop us from being able to do our jobs and we are going start fighting it every step of the way.

Hon. Scott Brison (Kings—Hants, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank the member from Outremont for his support and the support of the NDP for our motion today.

My question for him, as somebody who has served as a cabinet minister in the province of Quebec, is this. Has he ever seen the use of cabinet confidence used to actually deny from Parliament the cost of government legislation?

Does he agree with me that it is fundamentally important that once cabinet has rendered its decision on legislation and has introduced it to Parliament that it provide the cost of that legislation to Parliament to garner support for that legislation? Would he agree with that?

● (1625)

Mr. Thomas Mulcair: Mr. Speaker, the experience of my colleague from Kings—Hants is the same as mine. Of course that is what it has to do. That is the basic rule in a democracy and that is why the Speaker gave the ruling he gave today.

The Speaker is defending the institution of Parliament and our ability to carry out our fundamental role that we were elected to do. That is what the Conservatives are trying to stop us from doing.

It is a complex issue. I think in our society we tend to believe, because Parliament is there and we get the newscast at night and we see the subject of the day, that it will just continue on like that.

This is an assault on the institution. We are standing up, with the help of the Speaker, who was chosen to represent us and to apply the rules, saying enough of the Conservative government that will not play by the rules. It is a reflection of a profound disdain for democracy. We will start standing up to defend Canadians on this file.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): Is the House ready for the question?

Some hon. members: Question.

The Speaker: The question is on the motion. Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

(Motion agreed to)

Hon. John McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank you for your thoughtful ruling. I was very impressed as you went through the entire matter.

At this point, we generally have an opportunity to refer the matter to a committee, which is the usual form, or to have the House deal with it directly. That is a form which had been used, but it has fallen into disuse lately.

Mr. Speaker, I invite you to give consideration to this form of motion which would have the House deal with it rather than the committee itself. My argument is founded in Maingot.

First, the motion, as I would propose it, would be that the actions and words of the member for Durham in relation to the decision to de-fund KAIROS, including the doctoring of documents, and blatantly misleading answers in the House and its standing committees, which have already been subject to two committee studies, demonstrate a clear contempt for Parliament, and that the member be suspended from the service of the House until such time as she appears at the Bar of the House to purge her contempt by apologizing in a manner found satisfactory to the Speaker. This would be seconded by the member for Guelph

My argument is found in Maingot, at page 263. It states:

To have someone attend at the Bar to be questioned respecting alleged contempt or breach of privilege would be too cumbersome, particularly where witnesses would be called. Each question to the person of the Bar must be the subject of a debatable and amendable motion....

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The usual reason for referencing to a committee is, in fact, that witnesses are called, evidence is taken and other fresh material may be done in the form of a committee which cannot be done here. I submit that in this instance it is somewhat different. In fact, the House has before it all the evidence there is. There is no more evidence. We have reviewed questions in question period, access to information requests, order paper inquiries, et cetera. The entire and full body of evidence is presently before the House. Therefore, there are no other questions or witnesses to be put as one would normally do in a committee proceeding.

My motion would be that we proceed directly to the House being seized of this matter and that the House then debate the motion as is. If the vote on the debate turns out one way, then the member would be asked to apologize to the House.

I defer to your guidance on this matter, Mr. Speaker. As you said in your ruling, the Speaker does have the ultimate “robust” authority with respect to how a motion might be phrased.

My argument is that it is unnecessary to refer this to a committee.

● (1630)

The Speaker: I indicated in my ruling, both in the two rulings that I gave today, that the normal practice of the House was to refer these matters to committee for study. In this case in particular, I think I made it clear that this could clear the air on the matter if the proper questions were asked in the committee and the matter clarified.

Accordingly I am sticking with my initial statement that this can go to committee. Otherwise, I am not accepting another motion and I would not accept this motion were the hon. member to propose it.

Hon. John McKay: Mr. Speaker, I wonder whether you would consider a modified motion. The modified motion would be in the same manner up to the word “studies”, but then that the matter be referred to the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs and that the committee report back no later than March 25, 2011. We would delete the words after the word “demonstrate” and then the motion would therefore read that it be referred to the standing committee.

Would that be in order?

The Speaker: I suggest the member just move that the matter be referred to the standing committee. It is unnecessary to make other statements about the House's view on this at this stage. The committee can look at it and then the House can express its view when the matter comes back.

I would urge him to move that it be referred to the standing committee with a report date if he wishes. That, of course, can be subject to amendment in the House if there is not agreement on the date. I suggest that is what he do.

Hon. John McKay: Mr. Speaker, on your guidance, I move:

That the matter be referred to the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs and that the committee report back no later than March 25, 2011.

I do not intend to belabour this point. You have certainly heard a great deal of debate about this. The House has been subject to something in excess of 90 questions in question period about this matter, several order paper questions and access to information

requests, and two committee hearings. I do not intend to rehash old ground.

While this may well be a specific ruling about a specific minister and the way in which she has conducted herself, I believe there is in fact a larger issue and, more importantly, an indictment of the government of this country, the Government of Canada or as it has renamed itself. This is one of the issues on which I actually have some sympathy for the minister.

I believe the minister actually made a decision favouring KAIROS and then was instructed to reverse that decision. While she may have been somewhat clumsy in doing so, and certainly her explanation of her reversal of her decision left something to be desired, she has actually been taking the fall for someone else. If anything, she should be given a loyalty badge for her attempt to be a loyal soldier of the Conservative government.

I have asked quite a number of questions of the particular minister. Hon. members have asked quite a number of questions of the minister. Mr. Speaker, you have found that her answers were not fulsome. This issue is going to be referred to a committee. I do not know that a great deal will be added by further debate in this chamber.

With that said, I thank you for your ruling, Mr. Speaker. I thank you for your analysis and thoughtfulness.

● (1635)

Mr. Tom Lukiwski (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, CPC): Mr. Speaker, let me join my hon. colleague from Scarborough—Guildwood in thanking the Speaker for his ruling today.

I will take up some of this place's time to comment on the situation that we have before us, certainly with no intent to challenge the ruling of the Speaker but merely to add to the commentary of the Speaker when referring to the wish that committees clear the air on this issue.

I think that is a very telling point, because it appeared to me when I was listening very carefully to the Speaker's ruling that there was no admonishment directed toward the minister in question. It was merely an attempt to try to clear up the confusion that may be in the minds of some of the members opposite.

Therefore, I think it is very important to go back over the circumstances that brought us to this point today. I do think there is some confusion in the minds not only of the members of this place but perhaps also in the minds of many of the Canadian public as to what exactly happened. If I may, I want to take just a few moments to try to set the record straight.

All of this seemed to be precipitated by the appearance of the Minister of International Cooperation in December of last year at committee, at which time the members opposite had the opportunity to ask the minister one simple question about the insertion of the word “not” in an internal document that was communicated between CIDA officials and the minister.

The question was whether the “not” was inserted by members of CIDA or by the minister. As I pointed out in my intervention in response to the member's point of privilege a few weeks ago, the minister answered very truthfully, very accurately and very precisely when asked the question: did she know who had inserted the word “not” into that internal document. The Minister of International Cooperation said “no.”

I know that may confuse members opposite, but to me it seems to be a fairly simple, precise and accurate answer to a very simple question. That was an honest response to the question.

I know that the member for Toronto Centre seems to find this funny in seeming to laugh at this. I would remind the member that this is a place where we are supposed to have a meaningful debate. Apparently his time in the provincial legislature of Ontario has clouded his memory as to what meaningful debate truly is.

Mr. Speaker, perhaps you could even inform the member for Toronto Centre that he might have an opportunity to speak in this place. Perhaps he might even say something on which we could actually engage in meaningful debate. Until that time, perhaps he should sit in his place and listen to my words.

Now, we have both the member for Kings—Hants and the member for Toronto Centre.

Hon. Scott Brison (Kings—Hants, Lib.): I am one of the B-team guys.

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: Okay, and that is showing the member's character more than mine, I would point out.

Let me go back to what I was attempting to say before I was interrupted, which was simply that the minister responsible answered accurately and honestly when she said she did not know who had inserted the word “not”, because at the time, she did not. She explained that it was an internal document. She explained that she had instructed her staff to tell CIDA officials that she was not in favour of funding KAIROS.

One of her staff members, of her own volition, inserted the word “not” and sent it back with the electronic signature of the minister to convey to the officials at CIDA that the minister was not in favour of funding KAIROS.

At committee, officials from CIDA, including the president of CIDA, testified to the committee that they found that to have been appropriate. There were no surprises. In fact, it communicated accurately the minister's wishes not to fund KAIROS.

Quite frankly, who put the word “not” in the internal document is irrelevant, because what the minister was attempting to do, and did do, was to convey to her own officials that she, as minister, did not wish to fund KAIROS. That message was conveyed and accepted by the officials of CIDA, as they testified in committee. They were totally aware, by the insertion of the word “not”, that it was the minister's decision.

•(1640)

The CIDA officials also testified that they did not feel there was anything untoward by her putting in the word “not”. They testified that they did not think the minister was trying to deceive anyone as

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to the intent of that document, because it was an internal document; it was not a parliamentary document. It was meant to convey the minister's wishes back to her own officials.

In fact, the President of CIDA later testified that they are now taking steps to modify those internal documents to allow the minister to register her displeasure or dissatisfaction or opposition to a recommendation by having a separate box the minister could sign off on, a box saying, “I do not accept this recommendation”. Unfortunately, the way the documents were presented at the time did not include that separate opportunity for the minister to say, “I do not accept this recommendation”.

Therefore, when the minister instructed her own ministerial staff to convey back to CIDA officials that she did not wish to fund KAIROS, one of her staff members put in the word “not” and the document was signed with an electronic arm, since the minister was off on travel. The officials at CIDA responded by saying, “We totally understand what the minister's wishes are: she does not want to fund KAIROS. Message received. Message accepted”.

From that, we find ourselves in a situation where the opposition is contending that the minister was trying to deceive both Parliament and Canadian public. It contends that by the insertion of the word “not”, the minister was trying to deceive Parliament by inferring that the CIDA officials who originally recommended funding KAIROS were the ones who did not want to fund KAIROS.

Mr. Speaker, if you go back and check the records of the committee meeting in December 2010, the minister responsible for CIDA, on 11 separate occasions, stated before committee that it was her decision and her decision alone not to fund KAIROS. Thus how can there be any intent whatsoever at deception if the minister, in testifying before committee, stated that it was not CIDA officials who recommended not to fund KAIROS but her own decision?

I do not know where the confusion rests, other than to suggest that the opposition is using this as an opportunity, once again, to try to create a scandal where none exists. If it had been a parliamentary document, we might be having a different discussion and different debate here today. However, we are talking simply about an internal document between officials and the minister, a document aimed at determining whether or not the minister would accept the recommendation to fund the KAIROS group with \$7 million. It was an internal document. The minister told her officials that she did not wish to fund KAIROS. Accordingly, there should be no confusion whatsoever.

However, the opposition seems to be making a major issue of this by suggesting that the minister was intending to deceive. Nowhere in testimony before committee or before this House has the minister suggested that she was trying to deceive anyone. As I pointed out in my original intervention, in responding to the question of privilege by the member for Scarborough—Guildwood, the statements made in committee and the statements made in this House are not contradictory. In fact, they complement each another because when she was asked the precise question, the minister gave a precise answer.

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Unfortunately for the member for Scarborough—Guildwood, he did not follow up his line of questioning. Had he simply asked, “If you don’t know who inserted the word ‘not’, were you aware that the word ‘not’ was inserted, or were you instructing your department not to fund KAIROS?”. Had he asked that simple question or series of questions to that end, he would have had an affirmative response from the minister.

● (1645)

She would have been able to tell the committee at the time that certainly she instructed her officials to convey to the CIDA officials who made the recommendation initially that she was against the recommendation.

Because the member for Scarborough—Guildwood did not follow up with further questions does not mean that the minister responsible for CIDA was trying to deceive anyone. It simply means that the member for Scarborough—Guildwood, nor the rest of the opposition members, did not ask the probative questions they should have asked.

Should the minister be condemned, castigated, ridiculed or have her reputation sullied because she answered a precise question with a precise answer? I would suggest she should not be subjected to the type of abuse she has been subjected to for the last several weeks.

When is it a fault of anyone in this place to answer a direct question with a direct answer? How can anyone say, when giving a precise answer to a precise question, that one is trying to deceive Parliament?

If anyone in this place can cite one example where that has been proven or ruled upon as being deceptive, I would appreciate that member standing today to cite the example. No one can because there has not been, and never will be, an example of giving an honest and precise answer to a precise question that is considered deceptive. The minister responded accurately, yet members of the opposition seem to consider that to be a deception.

I also will comment on the motion that the member for Scarborough—Guildwood made to refer this matter to the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs. I have great concerns about that committee being able to honestly and in a non-partisan way try to arbitrate this question and the motion. The Speaker has said quite clearly that the attempt is to clear the air. The reason he invited a motion was to have a committee examine the situation and clear the air to remove any confusion that members may have.

I am not sure if the procedure and House affairs committee will be able to do that. I say that quite sincerely because we have seen, over the course of the past few months, a number of issues come before the procedure and House affairs committee and, in my view, the opposition coalition members who hold a majority on that committee, do not want to ask questions in a non-partisan manner to try to find answers to real questions. They are merely using their ability as the majority, the tyranny of the majority I would suggest, to attempt once again to embarrass the government.

I would point out an example that came before the procedure and House affairs committee very recently to illustrate my concerns. Not long ago, as I am sure all members of the House are aware, there was a very serious incident in which there was a breach of confidentiality

concerning the finance committee in which a staff member leaked a draft report from the Standing Committee on Finance to a number of registered lobbyists. The staff member worked for the member for Saskatoon—Rosetown—Biggar and as the chair has noted, the member for Saskatoon—Rosetown—Biggar went to extraordinary lengths to inform this place about the leak and how it happened.

As I pointed out in committee, had the member for Saskatoon—Rosetown—Biggar not done so, probably this whole issue would not have been discussed. At committee we found that rather than having opposition members applaud the actions by the member for Saskatoon—Rosetown—Biggar they went out of their way to try to condemn her, to try to suggest that she was at fault.

● (1650)

Nothing could be further from the truth. Those who know the hon. member for Saskatoon—Rosetown—Biggar know, as I do, that there is probably not a more upstanding, honest and forthright individual in Parliament today.

By her own volition, she took the unprecedented action to inform members of the finance committee, the Speaker of the House, the clerk of the committee and the chief information officer of the House as to the leak of confidential information. For that, even the chair admitted she should be congratulated for her actions. Yet opposition members who sit on the procedure and House affairs committee thought otherwise.

A report has been under discussion. While that report has not been tabled in the House, and I certainly cannot comment on the contents of the report since all of these discussions were in camera, I can say that the attitude of the members from the opposition coalition has certainly not been helpful and they have not, in my view at least, reflected accurately the testimony that was heard at committee. I would suggest that if the same attitude prevails with this new question of privilege, we will not end up clearing the air, as the Speaker has requested the committee to do.

I would suggest that it would be far better for a separate committee to examine this issue, hopefully a committee that would take this matter seriously and consider all of the elements that brought us here today, including the fact that the minister responsible for CIDA did not at any time deceive the committee that she first appeared before in December of last year.

Hopefully the committee would take into account the fact that the minister responsible for CIDA was completely honest in all of her comments to committee and Parliament. Hopefully the committee would recognize the fact that if there has been confusion in the minds of members of this place and of some Canadians, it was not because of the actions of the minister but of those in the opposition coalition who want to use this as a partisan method to try to bring forward an issue which has no real relevance before Parliament.

On another day at another time this issue would not be before this place. This issue would have been dealt with expeditiously and succinctly, in a spirit of honesty, in the spirit of Parliament's traditions, which is to ensure that testimony in this place and before committees is the one thing that should be preserved above all else. That is exactly what the minister responsible for CIDA has done. She has not tried to deceive or mislead. She has merely answered every single question honestly, and on top of that, informed committee members on many occasions that it was her decision and her decision solely not to fund KAIROS.

Since I do not believe that we will be able to get a fair hearing before the procedure and House affairs committee, I would move an amendment to the motion brought forward by the member for Scarborough—Guildwood that the motion be referred to the Office of the Conflict of Interest and Ethics Commissioner for further study and ask her to report her findings to the House.

• (1655)

Mr. Paul Szabo: Mr. Speaker, if you check, you will see that under Standing Order 108 the mandate of the procedure and House affairs committee is in fact clear that this particular matter is specifically the mandate of procedure and House affairs and that to suggest it go to any other body outside of Parliament would be inappropriate. I therefore suggest that the amendment is out of order.

Mr. Paul Dewar: Mr. Speaker, my colleague from the Liberal Party who moved the motion, initially unsuccessfully had moved a motion to have this dealt with through another process. It was the Speaker who turned him down. It was very clear to me and other members of Parliament that the reference to the procedure and House affairs committee was the advice that the Speaker. He said he did not think the proposal in the initial motion was the way to go. It is pretty clear that what was accepted by the Speaker was that it go through the regular process, and that is to the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs.

Therefore, I am a little confused. My friend from the Conservative Party would want us to deal with this in a straightforward manner as he said, a non-partisan manner as he said, as he talked about coalitions, but I will leave it to others to figure out what he was up to.

It is about due process and these matters are usually, as the Speaker suggested, referred to procedure and House affairs. We should leave it there and move on so we can actually get to a resolution on this issue.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): The Chair has heard the points made by the hon. members and will take those under consideration and report back to the House on the admissibility of the amendment in due course.

• (1700)

Hon. John McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the hon. member's desire to have this matter dealt with some place other than the procedure and House affairs committee. I wonder whether the hon. member would have supported, had he been able to, my initial desire to have the House deal with this matter, as I argued.

All of the evidence that is evidence is actually before the House. All of the relevant people to be questioned are before the House. All

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the material that is necessary to make a disposition is before the House.

My first question for the hon. member is: Would he have supported, had he been given the opportunity, the initial motion, which was to have the matter dealt with in the House and have the hon. member apologize to the House in front of the bar of Parliament?

My second question has to do with his argument that I should have asked specific questions, longer questions and quite a number of questions. I wonder which particular questions he thinks I should have asked.

I said, "Madam Minister, you've just said that you signed off. You were the one—" Then I was cut off by the minister, who said, "I sign off on all of the documents". I said, "Yes, and you were the one who wrote the 'not'". The minister said, "I did not say I was the one who wrote the 'not'". I asked, "Who did, then?" The minister responded, "I do not know". I asked, "You don't know?" The minister said, "I do not know". I stated, "That's a remarkable statement". It is still a remarkable statement.

We have had so many explanations of what happened. Had the hon. member been giving me advice at the time, would he have told me what other question I could have asked or specifically what other answer the minister could have given which would not have brought us to this point, i.e., an honest answer?

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: Mr. Speaker, I have to find this amusing.

On his first point, does the member believe that bringing the question before this House would have a fair and judicial response? Of course not. This would be nothing more than a kangaroo court. If we brought the question before this House, of course it would be, with the attitude of the opposition on this question.

Specifically, Mr. Speaker, let me answer his contention as to what questions should he have asked at committee. In my initial intervention a few moments ago, I gave him several suggestions of questions he could have asked, specifically: "Madam Minister, if you did not insert the word 'not' and you do not know who did, how did it happen? How did it occur?" The minister very clearly could have said, "Because I instructed my officials to communicate to CIDA that I was not in favour of funding KAIROS". That would have answered everything right there, a pretty simple follow-up question.

Instead, we had no question as a follow-up from the member opposite. He asked, "You didn't insert the word 'not'?" The minister responded, "No, I didn't". Rather than ask, "Then how did it happen?", he just said, "Well, that's a remarkable occurrence".

There are many questions the member for Scarborough—Guildwood could have asked as a follow-up to get the correct information he so desperately desires. To suggest that it is the minister's fault that he could not ask a simple follow-up question is not the fault of the minister. It is the fault of the member opposite.

Hon. Joseph Volpe (Eglinton—Lawrence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I find it astounding that a member of this House would suggest that members of Parliament would not be capable of listening to arguments and weighing reasonable responses.

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As an example, the issue from my perspective was simply one of asking the minister when she gave the instruction to put the “not” in a document that does not normally require that type of a response. It is simply a rejection or an acceptance. However, there was an insertion of a word on a document that had already approved, or appeared to approve, a particular funding.

The second issue is what prompted that request? The reason members of Parliament on this side of the House asked that question, of course, is that there is another related issue. The related issue has to do with another minister who went abroad to explain to a foreign audience why a domestic decision had taken place here in Canada with respect to KAIROS and why the \$7 million was not going to go to KAIROS, an organization that had been receiving government funding for some 35 years.

When that minister, the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration, came back to Canada, he denied that he had actually uttered those words, i.e., that KAIROS was engaged in a campaign of de-investment in Israel. What in fact he then said is, “No, I didn't say it”, and the newspapers outed him.

Subsequent to that, the minister responsible for CIDA came forward and said, “I now agree that it was on its merits”. The document was produced that indicated the word “not”.

The question was really simple for everybody. Maybe the hon. member could enlighten the House. Who gave her the direction to put the “not” in and when did it happen? Was it before the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration went to Israel to explain the government's position, or was it after the newspapers in Canada outed him on the lie?

• (1705)

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: Mr. Speaker, notwithstanding the fact that some unparliamentary language has been used here, I would suggest to my hon. friend opposite that, in my view, he must be watching far too many Oliver Stone movies, because he seems to be seeing an armed gunman behind every grassy knoll.

There is no conspiracy here. The minister has quite clearly stated on 11 occasions in committee that it was her decision. No one authorized it other than the minister. It was the minister's decision not to fund KAIROS. She stated that 11 times before committee.

I am not sure if the member opposite cannot understand that, so let me say it slowly and distinctly, because I know he is a Liberal. The minister made the decision herself.

Hon. Joseph Volpe: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order.

We try to do the very best we can in order to indicate language and direction of debate. There is a great weakness demonstrated by the member opposite when he prefers to think of Liberals as speaking methodically and systematically. For some reason that offends him. We are systematic. We are methodical.

I asked the member two questions. He cannot get away from those two questions by attempting a drive-by smear of those who already espouse a political position that is not his but is a correct one.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): The Chair is prepared to rule on both points of order. I am not sure if the one raised by the

hon. member for Eglinton—Lawrence falls under the rubric of points of order or whether it is debate.

Nevertheless, at this time the Chair is prepared to rule on the admissibility of the amendment. The Chair finds that the amendment is not admissible. In the Speaker's Ruling earlier today, the terms to proceed were laid out quite clearly. The hon. member for Scarborough—Guildwood made a couple of attempts at reshaping that advice from the Speaker and was rebuffed. Consistent with that, this is an issue of parliamentary privilege and will remain before the House of Commons rather than being taken to an official outside of this chamber.

Mr. Paul Dewar (Ottawa Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am not going to take too much time in speaking to the *prima facie* case of privilege, but it is important that we understand a couple of things about this issue.

I want to get back to the issue, that of KAIROS, because often that gets forgotten in this place. This is an organization which, as referenced earlier, has done stellar work. If we examine the evaluations of the department and consider the history of KAIROS, it has done stellar work for over 35 years.

The foreign affairs committee considered the issue of Sudan and the referendum that was about to happen. We studied the issue of Sudan, in particular, the south of Sudan. The referendum went fairly smoothly, but we needed experts before committee to tell us what was happening on the ground in Sudan. The committee asked to have KAIROS appear before the committee. This was after the decision was made by the minister to cut funding to KAIROS. The representatives from KAIROS provided very cogent arguments as to what the government should be doing.

It is important that we consider what we are talking about. It is not some partisan group. It is an ecumenical group. It is a group of churches that has been doing work abroad for 35 years. As someone who has travelled a bit in Africa and elsewhere, I can say that we need people on the ground who know what is going on in these areas. The department knows that. The minister knows that.

Seven million dollars is not a lot of money, but it is an important amount. It would also leverage money. KAIROS, as a group, was also able to raise money. Leveraging money is a responsible fiscal decision as well. It is really important that we understand what the issue is. It is about KAIROS. It is about the way the decision was made.

KAIROS is known around the world for the work it does. It is not about partisanship. It is not about the notion some on the other side have of KAIROS advocating on certain issues. That has been dealt with and I am not going to open that up again. The advocacy that was done, which I would be happy to share with some of my colleagues, was on things like dealing with impunity on sexual violence in the Democratic Republic of Congo.

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I laud the government for recently bringing out an action plan with respect to UN resolution 1325 to deal with the profound challenges of violence against women and the use of women in conflict. The gravity of this issue is such that we have a UN resolution, to which the government responded with an action plan. It was something we all wanted to see. We would like to see more money and action with respect to that action plan, but we know that we must have people on the ground who know what they are doing and what they are talking about.

We heard about the horrific gender violence in the Democratic Republic of Congo. The government said it was concerned about the military being able to get away with sexual crimes and that it was happy with some actions that were being taken. What it forgot to consider was the people who had been doing the work on the ground to help women and girls, who are extremely vulnerable in the DRC, to fight sexual violence and to make sure that this culture of impunity is challenged. KAIROS was doing that work. It was helping young women. It was helping girls to fight against the culture of impunity. Yes, it was advocacy.

If we examine the evaluations of the Department of Foreign Affairs and International Trade and of CIDA, we will actually find that one of the categories under which it puts its program funding is advocacy. Advocacy is not a dirty word. Advocacy is what we do when we help people take control of a situation, in a chaotic situation, in a precarious situation such as what is happening in the Democratic Republic of Congo.

● (1710)

When we look at the merit of the work that KAIROS does, it is really important that we understand why this decision was made, not just the way the information came out from the minister. It is important to understand the government's decision.

The government has said many times, in both the House and at committee, that it could not fund everyone. We understand that. It said that it would provide funding for other programs, giving the impression that it was unable to fund KAIROS because there was not enough money.

People believed the reason KAIROS did not get the funding was because there was not enough money. The problem with that is it is counter to the decision that was made and contrary to the advice given by the department. The deputy minister signed off on this funding. This program was in line with the programs the department believed should be funded. It was never made clear that there was not enough money throughout the debate or in the documents on record.

The minister said that it was her decision. What was that decision? Was her decision not in line with the government's policies, even though the department recommended funding? The buck stops with the minister. Yes, she has the authority to decide whether funding goes ahead or not.

However, the confusion lies in the impression that was given to members of the House and committee. The government said that it would like to fund KAIROS but it did not have the money. Then we were told, and this is the party line now, that what KAIROS was

doing was not in line with the government's priorities. That obviously needs to be cleared up.

There is one other thing that I find difficult to comprehend from the responses I have heard from the government. The minister had the application by KAIROS on her desk for two months. Why did the minister suddenly feel the need to doctor the document, which is what some members have called it? Others have called it a fraudulent document.

The fact is the minister had the document in front of her for two months. The story provided to us was that she was out of town and asked someone to use her signature stamp on the application. At some point, she directed someone to put the word "not" in the document. What is slightly unbelievable is that in 2010 we have not come up with a procedure or a form that would allow a minister to decline the advice of a department. That is hard to conceive.

That begs another question. Were there other applications in which the minister or someone else did the deed and inserted the word not? Members of the House and committee were told that the government wished it had a paper process in place, but it did not, so someone was directed to put the "not" in the document thereby changing the decision. I find that difficult to understand. Some members find it difficult to believe. I will leave that as it is.

What other decisions were made in that manner? Government members make it sound like there was a procedural problem. They tell us that problem has been changed so everything is fine now. What other documents went to the minister and she made her decision by inserting a word into the document? That is important for us to understand.

● (1715)

At the end of the day, when we have the evidence that was in front of us at committee, the evidence that was in front of us in the House and the evidence that the Speaker ruled on, it leaves some holes in terms of full disclosure. Full disclosure is important. If we look at the argument I made on this privilege motion, it goes back to Speaker Jerome's decision of 1978 with regard to the RCMP and the opening of people's mail without people knowing it.

The assertion at the time was the minister of the day said that this was not happening. The McDonald commission was established, following many allegations of improper conduct by the RCMP of the day. Alas, it came out during the McDonald commission that the RCMP was opening people's mail without their knowing it.

The minister was obliged to know those facts. That is why that reference was made by us in this decision. It is important for the minister, who asked someone to put the "not" in the document, would know who the person was. It is a basic notion of accountability. If ministers are directing people to change documents, it is incumbent upon them to at least tell us who those people are.

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This is not about, guess what I am thinking. That is what the government seems to put forward as an argument. Because we did not ask the right question, therefore the minister is off the hook, so to speak. In our system the minister, as a cabinet minister, should be held to the highest standard. It should not be about a minister waiting to see if we ask a certain question and then giving us a certain answer.

It is about full disclosure for full accountability. That is where I find the issue of privilege to be most cogent. The minister did say at committee that she did not know, and she was confused at times. She clarified later that she did not mean to convey that she was in line with the department's decision.

However, she did say that she did not know who put the word in that changed the outcome of the decision. Most reasonable people reading that, and certainly I was in the room when it happened, would be under the impression that she had nothing to do with it. Why do I say that? If people are asked if they are responsible for changing a document and they say that they do not know, we would assume they were not involved in that process. It is that simple and that is what we are left with.

If the minister had been living up to the standard of full disclosure and accountability, and frankly the standard that we should hold all cabinet ministers to, she would have said that she did not know who put the word in, but that she did direct someone to do it. I think that would have helped.

The way it has framed by the government is that nobody asked the exact question of who put the "not". We asked the minister who did it. We have to ask ourselves if it has come to this. We are talking about basic accountability.

What we want to know, further to what we have already had, is why the minister, after having this document on her desk for two months, rushed to have someone else doctor the document, someone she claimed to not even know?

Even if we find that she told us everything she knows, we have a problem with accountability. Basically the minister phoned in a decision to someone, we do not know who, to change the work that was done by KAIROS and all of the people in the department who had looked over this application and said that it should be endorsed.

I do not think we can have confidence in is the kind of procedure, where a minister out of town, phoning in and saying that he or she wants someone to insert a word to negate the decision that was signed off on and not know who that person is. We still have no idea who the person was.

● (1720)

You know what it is like around here, Mr. Speaker. People are hired by all of us to do our work. We are talking about a \$7 million application and I want to know that the minister is aware of who is doing the work and, in this case, who has inserted the word. We should at least know who did that. We also need to know the timing.

As has already been expressed, other cabinet ministers were in other parts of the world talking about why the government denied KAIROS funding. We now know they have seen the error of their ways and it was erroneous information. The Minister of Citizenship,

Immigration and Multiculturalism had no idea what he was talking about. He was talking about a different organization. A minister who is not even related to the portfolio was making claim on why a decision was made. Then there is the minister herself directing people to change documents and we do not know who the person is.

In the end, the decision of the Speaker was a wise one and we will need answers to these questions in the procedure and House affairs committee.

● (1725)

Hon. Bev Oda (Minister of International Cooperation, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise in regard to the ruling just made on the question of privilege raised on February 17 by members of the opposition.

I respect the ruling from the Speaker of the House. The Speaker is the arbiter of the rules of the chamber and I have the utmost respect for the Speaker and his office. I also have the greatest respect for the House of Commons and for each of my colleagues who are elected to serve Canadians from coast to coast to coast.

As is known and referred to, on Monday, February 14, I rose in the House to clear up any misunderstandings that might have existed about funding requests made by certain organizations. At that time I stated:

If some were led to conclude that my language implied that the department and I were of one mind on this application, then I apologize.

Let me be clear that I stand by that statement.

From the ruling made, it has been indicated that there appears to be confusion regarding the facts. While I believe I have been clear, I accept the ruling and look forward to providing all the clarity needed truthfully and respectfully in committee. I am fully prepared to offer that clarity and will fully co-operate with the committee and its members.

The trust placed in me by Canadians, by my constituents and by the Prime Minister to serve as a member for Parliament and the Minister of International Cooperation is a serious responsibility. It is a responsibility that I do not take lightly.

I am proud of our government's record on providing aid and assistance around the world that is meaningful and makes a sustainable real difference in the lives of those living in poverty.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): Is the House ready for the question?

Some hon. members: Question.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): The question is on the motion. Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Private Members' Business

(Motion agreed to)

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

• (1730)

[English]

PROTECTION OF INSIGNIA OF MILITARY ORDERS, DECORATIONS AND MEDALS ACT

The House resumed from March 2 consideration of the motion that Bill C-473, An Act to protect insignia of military orders and military decorations and medals that are of cultural significance for future generations, be read the third time and passed.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin): It being 5:30 p.m., the House will now proceed to the taking of the deferred recorded division on the motion at third reading stage of Bill C-473 under private members' business.

Call in the members.

• (1810)

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

(Division No. 198)

YEAS

Members

Abbott	Ablonczy
Aglukkaq	Albrecht
Allen (Welland)	Allen (Tobique—Mactaquac)
Allison	Angus
Armstrong	Arthur
Ashfield	Ashton
Atamanenko	Benoit
Bevington	Bezan
Blackburn	Blaney
Block	Boucher
Boughen	Braid
Breitkreuz	Brown (Newmarket—Aurora)
Brown (Barrie)	Cadman
Calandra	Cannan (Kelowna—Lake Country)
Carrie	Casson
Charlton	Chong
Chow	Christopherson
Clarke	Clement
Comartin	Crowder
Cullen	Cummins
Davidson	Davies (Vancouver Kingsway)
Davies (Vancouver East)	Day
Dechert	Del Mastro
Devolin	Dewar
Donnelly	Dreeshen
Duncan (Vancouver Island North)	Duncan (Edmonton—Strathcona)
Dykstra	Fantino
Fast	Finley
Flaherty	Fletcher
Galipeau	Gallant
Généreux	Glover
Godin	Goldring
Goodyear	Gourde
Gravelle	Grewal
Guergis	Harris (St. John's East)
Harris (Cariboo—Prince George)	Hawn
Hiebert	Hoback
Hoepfner	Holder
Hughes	Hyer
Jean	Julian
Kamp (Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge—Mission)	Keddy (South Shore—St. Margaret's)
Kenney (Calgary Southeast)	Kent
Kerr	Komarnicki

Kramp (Prince Edward—Hastings)	Lake
Lauzon	Layton
Lebel	Lemieux
Leslie	Lobb
Lukiwski	Lunn
Lunney	MacKenzie
Maloway	Marston
Martin (Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca)	Martin (Winnipeg Centre)
Martin (Sault Ste. Marie)	Masse
Mathysen	Mayes
McColeman	McLeod
Menzies	Merrifield
Miller	Moore (Port Moody—Westwood—Port Coquitlam)
Moore (Fundy Royal)	Mulcair
Nicholson	Norlock
O'Neill-Gordon	Ohrai
Paradis	Payne
Petit	Poilievre
Preston	Rafferty
Raitt	Reid
Richardson	Rickford
Ritz	Savoie
Saxton	Schellenberger
Shea	Shipley
Shory	Siksay
Sopuck	Sorenson
Stanton	Stoffer
Storseth	Strahl
Sweet	Thibeault
Thompson	Tilson
Toews	Trost
Tweed	Uppal
Van Kesteren	Vellacott
Verner	Wallace
Warawa	Warkentin
Watson	Weston (West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast—Sea to
Sky Country)	Wong
Weston (Saint John)	Yelich
Woodworth	
Young— 163	

NAYS

Members

Anderson	André
Andrews	Asselin
Bachand	Bagnell
Bains	Baird
Beaudin	Bélanger
Bellavance	Bennett
Bernier	Bigras
Blais	Bonsant
Bouchard	Bourgeois
Brisson	Bruinooge
Brunelle	Byrne
Calkins	Cannis
Cannon (Pontiac)	Cardin
Coady	Coderre
Cotler	Crombie
Cuzner	D'Amours
DeBellefeuille	Deschamps
Desnoyers	Dhaliwal
Dhalla	Dorion
Dosanjh	Dryden
Duceppe	Dufour
Duncan (Etobicoke North)	Easton
Eyking	Folco
Foote	Freeman
Gagnon	Gaudet
Goodale	Guay
Guimond (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques)	
Guimond (Montmorency—Charlevoix—Haute-Côte-Nord)	
Hall Findlay	Holland
Ignatieff	Jennings
Kania	Karygiannis
Kennedy	Laforest
Laframboise	Lamoureux
Lavallée	LeBlanc
Lee	Lemay
Lévesque	Malhi
Malo	McCallum
McQuinty	McTeague
Mendes	Minna

Private Members' Business

Mourani
Murphy (Charlottetown)
Nadeau
O'Connor
Ouellet
Paillé (Hochelaga)
Paquette
Pearson
Pomerleau
Rae
Rathgeber
Richards
Rota
Savage
Silva
Simson
Szabo
Tonks
Valeriotte
Vincent
Wilfert
Zarac — 119

Murphy (Moncton—Riverview—Dieppe)
Murray
Neville
Oliphant
Pacetti
Paillé (Louis-Hébert)
Patry
Plamondon
Proulx
Ratansi
Regan
Rodriguez
Russell
Sgro
Simms
St-Cyr
Thi Lac
Trudeau
Van Loan
Volpe
Wrzesnewskyj

Chow
Clarke
Coderre
Cotler
Crowder
Cuzner
Davies (Vancouver Kingsway)
DeBellefeuille
Desnoyers
Dhaliwal
Donnelly
Dosanjh
Dryden
Dufour
Duncan (Edmonton—Strathcona)
Eyking
Foote
Gagnon
Godin
Goodale
Guay
Guimond (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques)
Guimond (Montmorency—Charlevoix—Haute-Côte-Nord)
Hall Findlay
Harris (St. John's East)
Holder
Hughes
Ignatieff
Julian
Karygiannis
Kramp (Prince Edward—Hastings)
Laframboise
Lavallée
LeBlanc
Lemay
Lévesque
Malhi
Maloway
Martin (Winnipeg Centre)
Masse
Mayes
McColeman
McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood)
Mendes
Mourani
Murphy (Moncton—Riverview—Dieppe)
Murray
Neville
Oliphant
Pacetti
Paillé (Louis-Hébert)
Pearson
Pomerleau
Rae
Ratansi
Rodriguez
Russell
Savoie
Sgro
Shory
Silva
Simson
Stoffler
Szabo
Thibeault
Trudeau
Vellacott
Volpe
Wilfert
Young
Christopherson
Coady
Comartin
Crombie
Cullen
D'Amours
Davies (Vancouver East)
Deschamps
Dewar
Dhalla
Dorion
Dreeschen
Duceppe
Duncan (Etobicoke North)
Easter
Folco
Freeman
Gaudet
Goldring
Gravelle
Guergis
Harris (St. John's East)
Holland
Hyer
Jennings
Kania
Kennedy
Laforest
Lamoureux
Layton
Lee
Leslie
Lobb
Malo
Marston
Martin (Sault Ste. Marie)
Mathysen
McCallum
McGuinity
McTeague
Minna
Mulcair
Murphy (Charlottetown)
Nadeau
Norlock
Ouellet
Paquette
Plamondon
Proulx
Rafferty
Regan
Rota
Savage
Schellenberger
Shipley
Siksay
Simms
St-Cyr
Storseth
Thi Lac
Tonks
Valeriotte
Vincent
Watson
Wrzesnewskyj
Zarac — 172

PAIRED

Nil

The Deputy Speaker: I declare the motion carried.
(Bill read the third time and passed)

* * *

[Translation]

PATENT ACT

The House resumed from March 3 consideration of Bill C-393, An Act to amend the Patent Act (drugs for international humanitarian purposes) and to make a consequential amendment to another Act, as reported (with amendment) from the committee, and of the amendment to Motion No. 3.

The Deputy Speaker: The House will now proceed to the deferred recorded division on the amendment to Motion No. 3 at report stage of Bill C-393 under private members' business.

[English]

The question is on the amendment to Motion No. 3.

● (1820)

[Translation]

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

(Division No. 199)

YEAS

Members

Allen (Welland)
Allison
Andrews
Armstrong
Asselin
Bachand
Bains
Bélangier
Bennett
Bezan
Blais
Bonsant
Boughen
Brison
Byrne
Cannan (Kelowna—Lake Country)
Cardin
Charlton

Allen (Tobique—Mactaquac)
André
Angus
Ashton
Atamanenko
Bagnell
Beaudin
Bellavance
Bevington
Bigras
Block
Bouchard
Bourgeois
Brunelle
Calkins
Cannis
Casson
Chong

Abbott
Aglukkaq
Ambrose
Anderson
Ashfield
Benoit
Blackburn
Boucher
Breitkreuz
Brown (Barrie)

NAYS

Members

Ablonczy
Albrecht
Anders
Arthur
Baird
Bernier
Blaney
Braid
Brown (Newmarket—Aurora)
Cadman

Private Members' Business

Calandra	Cannon (Pontiac)
Carrie	Clement
Cummins	Davidson
Day	Dechert
Del Mastro	Duncan (Vancouver Island North)
Dykstra	Fantino
Fast	Finley
Flaherty	Fletcher
Galipeau	Gallant
Généreux	Glover
Goodyear	Gourde
Grewal	Harris (Cariboo—Prince George)
Hawn	Hiebert
Hoepfner	Jean
Kamp (Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge—Mission)	Keddy (South Shore—St. Margaret's)
Kenney (Calgary Southeast)	Kent
Kerr	Komarnicki
Lake	Lauzon
Lebel	Lemieux
Lukiwski	Lunn
Lunney	MacKenzie
Martin (Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca)	McLeod
Menzies	Merrifield
Miller	Moore (Port Moody—Westwood—Port Coquitlam)
Moore (Fundy Royal)	Nicholson
O'Connor	O'Neill-Gordon
Obhrai	Oda
Paradis	Patry
Payne	Petit
Poilievre	Preston
Raitt	Rathgeber
Reid	Richards
Richardson	Rickford
Ritz	Saxton
Shea	Sopuck
Sorenson	Stanton
Strahl	Sweet
Thompson	Tilson
Toews	Trost
Tweed	Uppal
Van Kesteren	Van Loan
Verner	Wallace
Warawa	Warkentin
Weston (West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast—Sea to Sky Country)	
Weston (Saint John)	
Wong	Woodworth
Yelich — 111	

PAIRED

Nil

The Deputy Speaker: I declare the amendment carried.

[*English*]

The question is on Motion No. 3 as amended. Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: On division.

(Motion No. 3, as amended, agreed to)

● (1825)

Mr. Paul Dewar (Ottawa Centre, NDP) moved that the bill, as amended, be concurred in.

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

An hon. members: On division.

The Deputy Speaker: I declare the motion carried.

(Motion agreed to)

The Deputy Speaker: When shall the bill be read the third time? By leave, now?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Mr. Paul Dewar moved that the bill be read a third time and passed.

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

An hon. member: On division.

The Deputy Speaker: I declare the motion carried.

(Motion agreed to, bill read the third time and passed)

* * *

[*Translation*]

BANKRUPTCY AND INSOLVENCY ACT

The House resumed from March 4 consideration of the motion that Bill C-501, An Act to amend the Bankruptcy and Insolvency Act (termination and severance pay), as reported (with amendment) from the committee, be concurred in.

The Deputy Speaker: The House will now proceed to the taking of the deferred recorded division on the motion for concurrence at report stage of Bill C-501, under private members' business.

● (1835)

[*English*]

And the Clerk having announced the results of the vote:

Mr. Bev Shipley: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. I would like to vote yes.

The Deputy Speaker: Does the hon. member have the unanimous consent of the House to have his vote recorded as a yea?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

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

(*Division No. 200*)

YEAS

Members

Allen (Welland)	André
Andrews	Angus
Arthur	Ashton
Asselin	Atamanenko
Bachand	Bagnell
Bains	Beaudin
Bélanger	Bellavance
Bennett	Bevington
Bigras	Blais
Bonsant	Bouchard
Bourgeois	Brison
Brunelle	Byrne
Cannan (Kelowna—Lake Country)	Cannis
Cardin	Carrier
Charlton	Chong
Chow	Christopherson
Clarke	Coady
Coderre	Comartin
Cotler	Crombie

Private Members' Business

Crowder	Cullen	Casson	Clement
Cuzner	D'Amours	Cummins	Day
Davidson	Davies (Vancouver Kingsway)	Dechert	Del Mastro
Davies (Vancouver East)	DeBellefeuille	Devolin	Dreeshen
Deschamps	Desnoyers	Duncan (Vancouver Island North)	Dykstra
Dewar	Dhaliwal	Fantino	Fast
Dhalla	Donnelly	Finley	Flaherty
Dorion	Dryden	Fletcher	Galipeau
Duceppe	Dufour	Gallant	Généreux
Duncan (Etobicoke North)	Duncan (Edmonton—Strathcona)	Glover	Goldring
Easter	Eyking	Goodyear	Gourde
Folco	Foote	Grewal	Harris (Cariboo—Prince George)
Freeman	Gagnon	Hawn	Hiebert
Gaudet	Godin	Jean	Kamp (Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge—Mission)
Goodale	Gravelle	Keddy (South Shore—St. Margaret's)	Kenney (Calgary Southeast)
Guay	Guergis	Kent	Kerr
Guimond (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques)	Guimond (Montmorency—Charlevoix—Haute-Côte-Nord)	Komarnicki	Lake
Harris (St. John's East)	Hoback	Lauzon	Label
Hoeppner	Holder	Lemieux	Lukiwski
Holland	Hughes	Lunn	Lunney
Hyer	Ignatieff	MacKenzie	Mayes
Jennings	Julian	McLeod	Menzies
Kania	Karygiannis	Merrifield	Moore (Port Moody—Westwood—Port Coquitlam)
Kramp (Prince Edward—Hastings)	Laforest	Moore (Fundy Royal)	Nicholson
Laframboise	Lamoureux	Norlock	O'Connor
Lavallée	Layton	O'Neill-Gordon	Obhrai
LeBlanc	Lee	Oda	Paradis
Lemay	Leslie	Payne	Petit
Lessard	Lévesque	Poilievre	Raitt
Lobb	Malhi	Rathgeber	Reid
Malo	Maloway	Richards	Richardson
Marston	Martin (Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca)	Rickford	Ritz
Martin (Winnipeg Centre)	Martin (Sault Ste. Marie)	Saxton	Shea
Masse	Mathysen	Sopuck	Sorenson
McCallum	McColeman	Stanton	Storseth
McGuinty	McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood)	Strahl	Sweet
McTeague	Ménard	Thompson	Toews
Mendes	Miller	Trost	Tweed
Minna	Mourani	Uppal	Van Kesteren
Mulcair	Murphy (Moncton—Riverview—Dieppe)	Van Loan	Verner
Murphy (Charlottetown)	Murray	Wallace	Warawa
Nadeau	Neville	Warkentin	Weston (West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast—Sea to
Oliphant	Ouellet	Sky Country)	Wong
Pacetti	Paillé (Hochelaga)	Weston (Saint John)	Yelich
Paillé (Louis-Hébert)	Paquette	Woodworth	
Patry	Pearson	Young— 119	
Plamondon	Pomerleau		
Preston	Proulx		
Rae	Rafferty		
Ratansi	Regan		
Rodriguez	Rota		
Russell	Savage		
Schellenberger	Sgro		
Shory	Shksay		
Silva	Simms		
Simson	St-Cyr		
Stoffer	Szabo		
Thi Lac	Thibeault		
Tilson	Tonks		
Trudeau	Valerioté		
Vincent	Volpe		
Watson	Wilfert		
Wrzesnewskyj	Zarac— 164		

NAYS

Members

Abbott	Ablonczy
Aglukkaq	Albrecht
Allen (Tobique—Mactaquac)	Allison
Ambrose	Anders
Anderson	Armstrong
Ashfield	Baird
Benoit	Bernier
Bezan	Blackburn
Blaney	Block
Boucher	Boughen
Braid	Breitkreuz
Brown (Newmarket—Aurora)	Brown (Barrie)
Bruinooge	Cadman
Calandra	Calkins
Cannon (Pontiac)	Carrie

Casson	Clement
Cummins	Day
Dechert	Del Mastro
Devolin	Dreeshen
Duncan (Vancouver Island North)	Dykstra
Fantino	Fast
Finley	Flaherty
Fletcher	Galipeau
Gallant	Généreux
Glover	Goldring
Goodyear	Gourde
Grewal	Harris (Cariboo—Prince George)
Hawn	Hiebert
Jean	Kamp (Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge—Mission)
Keddy (South Shore—St. Margaret's)	Kenney (Calgary Southeast)
Kent	Kerr
Komarnicki	Lake
Lauzon	Label
Lemieux	Lukiwski
Lunn	Lunney
MacKenzie	Mayes
McLeod	Menzies
Merrifield	Moore (Port Moody—Westwood—Port Coquitlam)
Moore (Fundy Royal)	Nicholson
Norlock	O'Connor
O'Neill-Gordon	Obhrai
Oda	Paradis
Payne	Petit
Poilievre	Raitt
Rathgeber	Reid
Richards	Richardson
Rickford	Ritz
Saxton	Shea
Sopuck	Sorenson
Stanton	Storseth
Strahl	Sweet
Thompson	Toews
Trost	Tweed
Uppal	Van Kesteren
Van Loan	Verner
Wallace	Warawa
Warkentin	Weston (West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast—Sea to
Sky Country)	Wong
Weston (Saint John)	Yelich
Woodworth	
Young— 119	

PAIRED

Nil

The Deputy Speaker: I declare the motion carried.

* * *

[Translation]

CANADA POST CORPORATION ACT

The House resumed from March 7, 2011, consideration of the motion that Bill C-509, An Act to amend the Canada Post Corporation Act (library materials), be read the third time and passed.

The Deputy Speaker: The House will now proceed to the taking of the deferred recorded division on the motion at third reading stage of Bill C-509 under private members' business.

● (1845)

[English]

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

(Division No. 201)

YEAS

Members

Abbott	Ablonczy
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Private Members' Business

Aglukkaq	Albrecht	Lunn	Lunney
Allen (Welland)	Allen (Tobique—Mactaquac)	MacKenzie	Malhi
Allison	Ambrose	Malo	Maloway
Anders	Anderson	Marston	Martin (Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca)
André	Andrews	Martin (Winnipeg Centre)	Martin (Sault Ste. Marie)
Angus	Armstrong	Masse	Mathysse
Arthur	Ashfield	Mayes	McCallum
Ashton	Asselin	McColeman	McGuinty
Atamanenko	Bachand	McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood)	McLeod
Bagnell	Bains	McTeague	Ménard
Baird	Beaudin	Mendes	Menzies
Bélanger	Bellavance	Merrifield	Miller
Bennett	Benoit	Minna	Moore (Port Moody—Westwood—Port Coquitlam)
Bernier	Bevington	Moore (Fundy Royal)	Mourani
Bezan	Bigras	Mulcair	Murphy (Moncton—Riverview—Dieppe)
Blackburn	Blais	Murphy (Charlottetown)	Murray
Blaney	Block	Nadeau	Neville
Bonsant	Bouchard	Nicholson	Norlock
Boucher	Boughen	O'Connor	O'Neill-Gordon
Bourgeois	Braid	Obhrai	Oda
Breitreuz	Brisson	Oliphant	Ouellet
Brown (Newmarket—Aurora)	Brown (Barrie)	Pacetti	Pailé (Hochelaga)
Bruinooce	Brunelle	Pailé (Louis-Hébert)	Paquette
Byrne	Cadman	Paradis	Patry
Calandra	Calkins	Payne	Pearson
Cannan (Kelowna—Lake Country)	Cannis	Petit	Plamondon
Cannon (Pontiac)	Cardin	Poilievre	Pomerleau
Carrie	Carrier	Preston	Proulx
Casson	Charlton	Rae	Rafferty
Chong	Chow	Raitt	Ratansi
Christopherson	Clarke	Rathgeber	Regan
Clement	Coady	Reid	Richards
Coderre	Comartin	Richardson	Rickford
Cotler	Crombie	Ritz	Rodriguez
Crowder	Cullen	Rota	Russell
Cummins	Cuzner	Savage	Saxton
D'Amours	Davidson	Schellenberger	Sgro
Davies (Vancouver Kingsway)	Davies (Vancouver East)	Shea	Shiple
Day	DeBellefeuille	Shory	Siksay
Dechert	Del Mastro	Silva	Simms
Deschamps	Desnoyers	Simson	Sopuck
Devolin	Dewar	Sorenson	St-Cyr
Dhaliwal	Dhalla	Stanton	Stoffer
Donnelly	Dorion	Storseth	Strahl
Dreeshen	Dryden	Sweet	Szabo
Duceppe	Dufour	Thi Lac	Thibeault
Duncan (Vancouver Island North)	Duncan (Etobicoke North)	Thompson	Tilson
Duncan (Edmonton—Strathcona)	Dykstra	Toews	Tonks
Easter	Eyking	Trost	Trudeau
Fantino	Fast	Tweed	Uppal
Finley	Flaherty	Valeriote	Van Kesteren
Fletcher	Folco	Van Loan	Vellacott
Footé	Freeman	Verner	Vincent
Gagnon	Galipeau	Volpe	Wallace
Gallant	Gaudet	Warawa	Warkentin
Généreux	Glover	Watson	Weston (West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast—Sea to
Godin	Goldring	Sky Country)	
Goodale	Goodyear	Weston (Saint John)	Wilfert
Gourde	Gravelle	Wong	Woodworth
Grewal	Guay	Wrzesnewskyj	Yelich
Guergis	Guimond (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les	Young	Zarac— 286
Basques)			
Guimond (Montmorency—Charlevoix—Haute-Côte-Nord)			
Hall Findlay			
Harris (St. John's East)	Harris (Cariboo—Prince George)		
Hawn	Hiebert		
Hoback	Hoepfner		
Holder	Holland		
Hughes	Hyer		
Ignatieff	Jean		
Jennings	Julian		
Kamp (Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge—Mission)	Kania	Nil	
Karygiannis	Keddy (South Shore—St. Margaret's)		
Kenney (Calgary Southeast)	Kent		
Kerr	Komarnicki		
Kramp (Prince Edward—Hastings)	Laforest	Nil	
Laframboise	Lake		
Lamoureux	Lauzon		
Lavallée	Layton		
Lebel	LeBlanc		
Lee	Lemay		
Lemieux	Leslie		
Lessard	Lévesque		
Lobb	Lukiwski		

NAYS

PAIRED

The Deputy Speaker: I declare the motion carried.

(Bill read the third time and passed)

The Deputy Speaker: It being 6:45 p.m., the House will now proceed to the consideration of private members' business as listed on today's order paper.

*Private Members' Business***IMMIGRATION AND REFUGEE PROTECTION ACT**

Ms. Olivia Chow (Trinity—Spadina, NDP) moved that Bill C-566, An Act to amend the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act (sponsorship of relative), be read the second time and referred to a committee.

She said: Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure to move my private member's bill, seconded by the member for Vancouver Kingsway, Bill C-566, a once in a lifetime bill.

We know that about 1,000 young people leave Ireland each week in search of work. Most of them are young and educated and about 50,000 of them are expected to leave this year alone. A large number of them are going to Australia and many other countries. We know they are highly skilled. Some of them are coming to Canada as temporary foreign workers. One reason they are leaving is that the youth unemployment rate in Ireland skyrocketed from 10% to 30% between 2008 and 2010. Ireland is not the only country young people are leaving.

In Spain, youth unemployment doubled from 20% to 40% between 2008 and 2010. In Greece, youth unemployment is over 25% and 40% of young people are actively looking for jobs abroad.

I am talking about these young people because some of them are coming to Canada as temporary foreign workers. As New Democrats, we see immigrants as nation builders, not just economic units. We want them to come as landed immigrants so that one day they, too, can bring their families to Canada.

This once in a lifetime bill would allow Canadians to sponsor nieces, nephews, brothers and sisters to come to Canada. It would be Canadians' choice as to who they want to sponsor. They may want to sponsor a niece who is looking to leave Europe because she is in search of a job and Europe is having a hard time.

This bill would allow Canadians to sponsor relatives to come to Canada. They would need to have enough financial resources to support a landed immigrant coming to Canada. If we look at the history of Canada, that is in fact what has been done in the past.

In 1847, 38,000 Irish immigrants came to Toronto because of the famine in Ireland. At that time, Toronto's population was only 20,000. These Irish immigrants were welcomed with open arms and went on to help build Toronto into the city that it is today. In my riding just a couple of years ago, Ireland Park was opened to honour the 38,000 Irish immigrants who overcame difficult hardships and suffering. It speaks to the kindness and generosity of Canadians at that time.

These young people are highly-educated and they need jobs and to begin their lives. If they come to Canada, they can travel, visit, study or work but they cannot come here as landed immigrants. Most of them would not be able to turn their temporary status into permanent status in Canada.

• (1850)

I recently spoke to a friend of mine, Jonathan Kearns, with whom I worked very closely during the establishment of Ireland Park in Toronto. He has an architectural firm and is doing well. He has received new contracts and is looking for workers. Jonathan was able to bring a few young people over from Ireland but he had to go

through a lot of red tape to make sure they were able to work in Canada. When their temporary work visas expire, they will have to go back home where they will have to wait for a long time before coming back here. It is very onerous. They still have temporary status.

The New Democratic Party wants people who come to Canada to be able to establish roots here and eventually bring their families here. That is why we are pushing this once-in-a-lifetime bill. My former colleague, Peggy Nash, was able to get this bill to second reading stage but unfortunately, the Liberals across the way were badly split on it and by a narrow decision the bill was not passed. As a result, many Canadians who want to sponsor their loved ones, a brother, a sister, a son or daughter over 22 years of age, a cousin, a niece or nephew, are not able to do so.

That has not always been the case. Other than family class, Canada has always had an assisted relative class. A Canadian would be able to sponsor a brother, sister, cousin, or a child over age 22. That person would get five points and if they qualified would be able to come to Canada. Unfortunately that provision in the immigration act was eliminated in the late eighties or early nineties.

As a result, Canada has been treating immigrants as economic units. We now have 180,000 temporary foreign workers in Canada. They come and work but they cannot stay. They can only work here for a few years and after that they have to leave.

That is not our vision of Canada. The Conservative government has said that it values families, yet it is taking much longer now to sponsor a parent. The waiting list has mushroomed. There is a much longer waiting period.

In the last 10 years family reunification has become less important. Canada benefits greatly when families come together. That is a Canadian value. That is how Canada was built. Irish immigrants were able to sponsor their relatives. During the sixties, seventies and eighties Portuguese immigrants were able to do the same. They were able to sponsor their brothers and sisters, sons and daughters over age 22. It was the same with the Italians. Many Europeans who came to Canada brought all of their relatives with them. That is no longer the case with the present immigration act.

St. Patrick's Day is next week. In Toronto this coming Friday the Ireland Fund of Canada will be holding its annual celebration. It reminds me again of the role that the Irish have played in building our city.

• (1855)

It is about time that we say to young people across Europe that they should consider coming to Canada and not just to Australia because a large number of them are going there.

Private Members' Business

We note that they are coming here on a study travel work permit. Last year 4,229 people were granted a visa to come here. The number of temporary foreign workers coming to Canada from Ireland has doubled since 2004. These are highly skilled young people. Many of them have relatives in Canada and they want to stay in Canada because their loved ones are here.

Jonathan Kearns tells me he has a cousin that he would love to sponsor to Canada. Jonathan and his brother Robert have never sponsored a person into this country. They think it is important that they be given the chance, if they so choose, to give a family member the chance to start a career and put down roots in Canada.

The bill has an impact more on the older immigrant groups that are more established in Canada. Most of them have not sponsored anyone, whereas the more recent immigrants have been able to sponsor their father, mother, spouse or their children, which is fine, but in this time, especially with the young people of some European countries having a hard time, it is important to consider this bill.

We could still keep the immigration quota to 1% of the Canadian population. We know that we could use the labour force and we need these young people in this country. We need their work, their drive, their enthusiasm and energy. I know they would be successful.

According to Ireland's Economic and Social Research Institute, 70% of the unemployed youth 18 to 25 years old are set to emigrate from Ireland to Australia this year. We know that the education system in Ireland is extremely successful since university education is almost free. They are highly educated and we can use their talents. The same thing may be said for Spain, Greece and Portugal. With such high unemployment, it is a good opportunity for people to connect with their relatives here in Canada.

The bill would expand the family class definition and would allow a Canadian to sponsor loved ones into Canada. This is what Canada has always done. This is what our immigration system should be about. It is about building our nation. It is about uniting families. It is about giving people the opportunity to build a better life here in Canada. We have the history to show that it is successful and this is an opportune time for us to enact this once-in-a-lifetime bill.

I do hope that I have the support of both the Liberal Party and the Conservative Party. In the past the Bloc members have been supportive of this bill to amend the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act and bring these young people to Canada.

• (1900)

Ms. Ruby Dhalla (Brampton—Springdale, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise today on behalf of many of my constituents of Brampton—Springdale, which is home to one of the largest immigrant communities here in Canada. I know the member has done a significant amount of work as well on the issue of immigration. I wanted to get her thoughts on an issue that I am hearing as I go door to door, and meet constituents at different events.

Their concerns are in regard to the increased wait times we have seen for Canadians who have sponsored either a mother, father, or another individual from their family. They have frequently spoken of their frustration. When they originally sponsored their family members they were wait three to four years, and since the

Conservative government was elected, they have actually seen an increase in those waiting times to six or seven years.

More alarming was some of the information that came to light a few weeks ago. It was discovered that with some of the changes the Conservative government wanted to propose to immigration, not only would we be seeing a reduction in the number of immigrants, but also an increase in waiting times to almost 13 years potentially for people who have sponsored their families. We know that many, even if they came here in an economic class, came with the understanding that based on our previous immigration policy under a Liberal government, they actually had the opportunity to be reunited.

Another frustration we have seen over and over again is in regard to the refusal of visitor visas, especially in embassies like New Delhi and Chandigarh.

I wanted to get the member's thoughts on some of these challenges.

Ms. Olivia Chow: Mr. Speaker, already there is a backlog of 12,000 parents in New Delhi, waiting to join their children in Canada. These Canadians have waited on average for 13 years. They are looking at 6, 8, 10, and 13 years.

Why is it growing that way? This year the quota for parents coming from New Delhi is now 2,300. Last year, it was 5,000. Last year's quota of 5,000 dropped by half to 2,300. This means that the people who are waiting for their parents are going to wait much longer. The list is going to grow and that is really unfair.

Hon. Jason Kenney (Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask the member for Trinity—Spadina if she is not aware that the government's target for family reunification is increasing in 2011 over the 2010 levels. In fact, it is going up to a maximum in the planning range of 65,500 under the family class. Because there is an increased demand for spouses and children to come to Canada, that increase has been offset in the parent and grandparent category.

The Immigration and Refugee Protection Act says we have to put the priority on spouses and dependent kids. Does she agree that should be the priority within the broader family class? If so, would she be prepared to offer an amendment to IRPA in order to say that grandparents are more important than spouses and dependent kids in terms of our priorities?

• (1905)

Ms. Olivia Chow: Mr. Speaker, I totally agree that spouses and children are more important. However, it used to be that it would take six months for people who sponsored their spouse and children to come here. Now it is at least a year or year and a half, depending on which country they are coming from.

It used to be that if people were sponsoring a mother or father, it would be a year or two years. I remember two years was a long time in the early eighties. Now, they are lucky if just the sponsorship application gets considered in three years.

Private Members' Business

Why does it have to be an either or situation? Why can we not increase the quota so it would go beyond the 65,000? We could clear the backlog so that the wait time does not become longer. I know of families whose parents died waiting.

Hon. Jason Kenney (Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to debate this bill. I commend my colleague from Trinity—Spadina for her diligence and hard work on immigrant issues, about which she is very passionate. I would normally say she is quite well-informed about those issues, however I cannot say that after having heard her speech tonight.

First, I register strongly with her comments about Ireland Park and the Irish immigrants of 1847, including my great-great-grandfather, the Irish and other European young people seeking employment opportunities in Canada and elsewhere right now. I agree entirely that our immigration system ought to be flexible and supple enough to respond to emerging developments like that, where we have a large number of skilled young people who could come to Canada, work their whole lives, pay taxes in our country and who could be not just an economic part of our economy, but also fully active citizens.

Let us be clear about this. Canada is maintaining the largest immigration program in the developed world. We welcome the equivalent of 0.8% of our population per year. Just to put that in perspective, the second-largest immigrant receiving country in proportionate terms is Australia at 0.5% of population. The United Kingdom, one of the most open countries in Europe with respect to immigration, is this year capping intake at 100,000 for a population twice our size.

To put it in perspective, by orders of magnitude, we are the most open country to immigration. It was not always this way. For example, under the Liberal government in the 1970s and 1980s, the maximum number of immigrants allowed in 1983, for example, under the Liberal administration at that time, was about 85,000 immigrants. During that Liberal recession, the Liberals slashed immigration rates in half.

This government decided to maintain high immigration levels during this recession. In fact, last year we welcomed 281,000 new permanent residents, the highest number of immigrants landed in Canada in 57 years and the second-highest number of immigrants landed in Canada in over nine decades. Let us put that on the record. There is not a heck of a lot of political debate about this. As a country, we are open. We are generous to economic immigrants, to refugees and to family members.

First, we have to acknowledge that there are practical limits to how many people we can put through the immigration process in a given year, with limited resources and so on. There are practical limits to how many people we can settle. People talk about the problem of homelessness. In my city of Calgary, counterintuitively, it is one of the most vibrant communities in the country economically, but there is a fair degree of homelessness because so many people are coming for jobs and there are not enough homes available.

We need to have an immigration program that is sensitive to our capacity to accept people, to ensure they get jobs. One of the biggest

concerns we should all have is that newcomers have a disproportionately high unemployment rate. Do we really want to massively increase the overall rate of immigration only to invite people here to face unemployment? Do we really want to burden our provincial and local governments with newcomers above and beyond the current levels when there are challenges with respect to public schooling and health care?

I would suggest, as the minister responsible for the highest level of immigration in six decades, we need to be mindful of the limits. We should also be mindful of public opinion.

Last September Angus Reid did a poll that confirmed results from the year previous, which indicated nationally and in Ontario the numbers were almost identical. The member comes from Ontario so I will tell her that only 15% of Ontarians said that we should increase immigration levels, 36% said to stay the same, 42% said to decrease immigration. Therefore, 78% of her fellow Ontarians said that we should keep the same levels or to decrease them.

● (1910)

A moment ago, she implied the way we could accommodate both these young economic prospective immigrants from Ireland and all the potentially millions of additional family members she proposes through the bill would be to increase the overall levels from 265,000 in our current plan 1% of population, which would be 340,000.

Our ministry does not have the capacity to process anything close to 340,000 people. I am highly skeptical that our municipalities and provincial governments have the capacity to absorb that many newcomers in terms of social programs, health care, educational services and housing.

I am very concerned. Let me be blunt about this. We are unique in the democratic world in having a robustly pro-immigration political consensus among the political parties. We are one of the only democracies that does not have a xenophobic voice in our democratic debates in our politics. I want to keep it that way. I do not want these poll numbers to turn into a negative reaction to immigration.

I have a special responsibility as the minister, but we all have a responsibility in this place, not to make some of the mistakes that, for example, in western Europe have led to xenophobia and hostility to newcomers. This is why I would suggest that while we can keep robust levels, we need to be mindful of how many people Canadians think we can receive.

Private Members' Business

One thing I would like to point out as a pre-emptive rebuttal, in case anyone suggests that these 78% of Canadians are somehow closet xenophobes and anti-immigrant, is the public attitudes in immigration among new Canadians who moved here, who immigrated here, are the same as the general population. Immigrants to Canada say that they like immigration, but that we need a manageable program and that we should not increase by orders of magnitude. This is the real problem we have.

We have the largest program in the world, yet there are all sorts of competing demands for the scarce amount of spaces there. Let us call it 265,000 spaces for new permanent residents. That is the maximum in our planning range, as it has been for about seven years, under two separate governments.

How do we select who those 265,000 people are going to be? After all, we have a managed immigration program. We want to choose the right mix of people who will fuel our economic growth, pay taxes and help to manage the enormous unfunded future liabilities for health care, social programs and public pensions. We want people who will integrate successfully. At the same time, we want to recognize our humanitarian obligation to refugees. As the member will acknowledge, our government is increasing the target for resettled refugees by 20%. We also obviously want to facilitate reasonable levels of family-class immigration.

The member's bill would massively expand the family reunification program by allowing, essentially, anyone to come here. Based on the categories she defines in Bill C-566, my department advises me that we would be creating the capacity of "several millions" new prospective family-class immigrant applicants.

If the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act is amended in this fashion, that would mean we would receive hundreds of thousands, prospectively millions, of applications that we would be obliged, legally, to process. What happens to those applicants? They submit their applications and their fees. They say "hooray member for Trinity—Spadina" because she is allowing them, as cousins of a Canadians, or nieces or nephews, and I am surprised she did not include godchildren, to enter the country, to make an application.

Do members know what that would mean? They are going to wait. Forget about waiting for five years or ten years. They are going to wait for decades. This bill is a recipe for making false promises.

We already have the most generous family immigration program in the world. Of the 181,000 immigrants we received last year, 180,000 were either the immediate dependants of primary immigrants or subsequently sponsored parents, grandparents, spouses and children.

•(1915)

Consistently, over the past 15 years, on average two-thirds of the immigrants landed in Canada were not primary economic immigrants, which she dismisses as economic units, they were family members. What she is proposing is going from a ratio of one primary economic immigrant to every two family members to completely turning that on its head.

I want those bright, young Irish and other folks who want to come and work here, but we need to attract them through our economic immigration programs. If we crowd out all the space with our federal

skilled worker program, our provincial nominee programs, by massively expanding the family class, that means those bright, young Irish and other folks will be unable to come here because they are the classic economic immigrants.

The House might get the impression that I am opposed to the bill.

Mr. Justin Trudeau (Papineau, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the minister of immigration and I have had our political differences this week, but on this matter of policy, we are very much on the same page.

[*Translation*]

This bill would give citizens and permanent residents a once-in-a-lifetime chance to sponsor a member of their extended family, which includes brothers, sisters, nephews, nieces, aunts, uncles and cousins. That is a wonderful idea. It would be commendable if our system worked wonderfully and if we did not have waiting lists and wait times that are much too long. Our priority must be to first bring over people who will help build a stronger country and to recognize the importance of immediate family members, such as children, spouses and, of course, parents and grandparents. However, to be honest, I think that our system is not robust or efficient enough, considering the resources we have, to expand this definition to include brothers, sisters, aunts and cousins.

[*English*]

When the member for Trinity—Spadina stood to respond to a question, she went on about the horrific wait times that people are facing. I absolutely agree with her. I have the honour of sitting with her on the Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration, which is doing a wait time study that deals with the hardship so many new Canadians are going through right now. They are waiting far too long to bring over their loved ones, spouses or children. The wait time is 8, 10 and sometimes even 12 years to bring over one's parents or grandparents.

What concerns me is that the proposal by the member for Trinity—Spadina would actually increase significantly the wait times for all of those people who are still waiting for their close relatives. Far from improving the system, it would be making it worse for everyone.

She talked about young Irish and European immigrants who are interested in coming here and that somehow being able to encourage their cousins, brothers or sisters to come would be a major incentive for those young people to come. Perhaps it would form a small part of an incentive, but the genuine incentive, which she mentioned herself, for those young people to come over would be to find work, to be able to build a family, to be able to create a future.

Private Members' Business

For most people, building a family and creating a future does not depend on being able to bring over an uncle, aunt, nephew, niece, cousin or extended relatives. It means bringing over a spouse, a parent or grandparent. Sometimes it means bringing over children.

The member mentioned that she would specifically target young people. It would be wonderful for young people to bring other young people, their cousins, brothers or sisters. Nothing in her bill specifically targets young people. It is a one-time permission to sponsor anyone. As the Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism mentioned, there potentially could be millions more people applying to come here.

We need to make sure we keep a robust and effective principle of citizenship and immigration that brings over the best and brightest from around the world and sets them to work to build their own relevance. We need to allow them to achieve their hopes and dreams, and give them the tools to do so. Our immigration system is the most generous in the world. Canadians who are defined not by their differences but by the strengths of their differences need to remain firm in understanding that people can come to Canada and build their lives.

Even though the minister is proud of having welcomed record numbers of people last year, at the same time he is cutting \$53 million from settlement services for those vulnerable new Canadians. This will make it more difficult for people to integrate, prosper, develop language skills and find jobs in their areas of expertise. It will make it more difficult for them to feel like fully valued, relevant participants in building this great country, as we do every day, all of us, as Canadians.

The challenge we are facing now is how to make our current system work better, a challenge that, to my mind, the Conservative government has not lived up to yet, certainly not when it is insisting on cutting family class immigration for parents and grandparents, certainly not when it is cutting settlement services that would allow new Canadians to succeed. One thing we cannot do, however nice it might seem to be able to do it, is further expand at this time the definition of the family classes we can sponsor.

● (1920)

[*Translation*]

The reality is that we simply do not have the resources to open the country up like that. The same people who might be happy to be able to sponsor their cousins, aunts and uncles would be even more frustrated to have to wait even longer for their spouse, children or grandparents. That is why the Liberal Party is not inclined to support this motion.

Mr. Thierry St-Cyr (Jeanne-Le Ber, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to speak today about Bill C-566, which was introduced by the member for Trinity—Spadina. The Bloc Québécois agrees with the principle of this bill but reserves the right to examine its full implications in committee.

The Bloc Québécois believes in the importance of family reunification for immigrants and refugees who come to Canada to rebuild their lives. This is part of the integration process. Being reunited with their families makes it easier for them to integrate into the country and helps to ensure their social and economic success.

This is something that we believe in and that we want to encourage. Under the current act, only immediate family members can be sponsored—father, mother and children. This bill broadens the definition of relative to include brothers, sisters, uncles, aunts, nieces, nephews, first cousins and adult children.

In order to limit what this could mean in terms of volume, a person could only sponsor a relative who is not a member of their immediate family once in his or her lifetime. In theory, this appears reasonable and that is why we are going to support this bill. Now, we must determine in committee whether it is also reasonable in practice. Will we be able to meet the demand? Everyone in the House, particularly the members of the Standing Committee on Citizenship and Immigration, knows that there are currently huge processing delays in our immigration system. We will have to determine whether to increase the quota in response to the additional applications or, if we decide to maintain the quota, we will have to determine who will be penalized and who will be processed more quickly.

There are already different priority levels. Family class applications are processed faster than others. Children, for instance, are brought over faster than parents. Thus, this could have repercussions on the categories that already exist. All of this needs to be examined. Wait times in our immigration system have become a real problem. I have been the Bloc Québécois critic for citizenship and immigration and a member of the committee for over three years now. I am following this file very closely and I strongly believe that wait times are used as a tool to manage our immigration system.

In any bureaucratic system, wait times are to be expected. With just about any service, even in the private sector, there are often wait times, which are caused by the fact that not enough resources are available to meet the needs.

For example, in the health care system, we want to treat and heal people as quickly as possible but, given the lack of doctors and funding, we have difficulty keeping up with patients as they come in, hence the wait times. Wait times in health care, for example, are the result of an insufficient allocation of resources, albeit involuntary.

That is not what is happening with immigration. Wait times are used to limit the number of newcomers coming into the country. It is as simple as that. Family reunification is a case in point.

● (1925)

Annual quotas are set, as are the number of files that will be processed and the number of people who will be accepted within the scope of family reunification. According to the law, anyone is fully entitled to family reunification, unlike economic immigration. In that case, a grid is used to determine whether people meet the requirements. They are given a score and if the score is high enough, they are eligible to immigrate. In this kind of situation, the score can always be adjusted and the requirements can be raised or lowered. That means that the number of people accepted can be controlled somewhat.

Private Members' Business

When it comes to family reunification, with the current law and the way the department currently works, there is no way to restrict the number of people applying to immigrate. Generally speaking, if you apply, you get in. There are some requirements that must be met. If someone sponsors his son and has the economic resources to do so, he is eligible. The only way the government can control the flow is to deliberately choose to allocate insufficient resources in order to stem the tide.

It is important to understand that. All applications for immigration and family reunification—except refugee claims—come with fees that generally cover the costs associated with the system. Unlike the health care system, for instance, which is underfunded, the government would have no problem funding the processing of all applications as soon as they come in. However, if it did that, its objectives and quotas would of course be shattered.

That is the core of the problem. On top of that, there is the regional aspect of immigration. Although Canada does not have an official policy concerning quotas for any given countries, in practice, in terms of management and the allocation of resources to various Canadian missions around the world, there are in fact regional quotas. For example, if the government wants to slow down immigration from a particular region of Africa, for instance, it will simply allocate fewer resources to that mission. Thus, wait times will increase and the number of people arriving from that region will go down.

That is how Canada's immigration system is being controlled. I think it is sad. Human beings are expected to wait for years in uncertainty and in the dark. Everyone here in the House probably knows of someone who wants to bring over their parents, who die of old age before anything ever happens. I am sure that every MP in this House knows of at least one case where that has happened. It is very sad to see.

We will not be able to do so with this bill, obviously, but we will need to look at the whole issue in committee to find a way to control the flow of immigrants, through various programs, without using wait times as the only tool to manage the situation.

I want to come back to the bill before us, after that lengthy aside, which I felt was important. In committee, the Bloc Québécois wants to look at how this bill will affect wait times, the people who are already in line, the people who are already filing applications. We want to see what the government's intentions are. Will it increase quotas accordingly? Will it keep quotas at the same level? What repercussions will this have on individuals?

The wise thing to do in this case is to refer the bill to committee. The Bloc Québécois will support the principle of this bill. I hope we will have the opportunity, in committee, to look at all the implications in greater detail in order to make a fair assessment.

• (1930)

[English]

Mr. Don Davies (Vancouver Kingsway, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am proud to speak in support of Bill C-566, the once in a lifetime bill that was introduced by my colleague from Trinity—Spadina.

The bill would allow any Canadian citizen or permanent resident to sponsor, on a one time basis only, a family member who was not

part of the family class as currently defined to immigrate to Canada. This would allow a Canadian citizen or a permanent resident to sponsor people like their brother or sister, their aunt or uncle, their niece or nephew, their first cousin or a child over the age of 22, all categories that are not permitted under the current family class.

This is an excellent, well-conceived and well-drafted piece of legislation that highlights the superb record of New Democrat initiative, energy and creativity in the House. It also addresses a very real and serious problem. It details a sensible and cost-effective solution. It is a practical step that would deliver fast and concrete benefits for tens of thousands of Canadian families.

I want to note the current situation which is very problematic, and most members of the House who deal with immigration issues in their offices would agree. Right now there is a very narrow definition of family in the family sponsorship class of immigration. It includes only a person's parents, spouse or children. It fails to take into account a far wider and more prevalent concept of family in most of the world. That is an extended concept of family, where sisters and brothers, aunts and uncles, cousins, nieces and nephews are all integral parts of the family unit.

Also, there is no doubt in this country that the current sponsorship times take far too long. I have constituents who are waiting seven to ten years to bring their parents over, and that is not unusual. There is a backlog that began under the previous Liberal government. At the time, in 2006, when the current government took over, I understand there was a backlog of one million applicants, and I do not think it is much better today. We have heard evidence that the New Delhi office alone has 14,000 parents waiting to come here to join their families.

I want to note that the bill would provide no burden on the taxpayers of Canada because the sponsors would have to demonstrate that they can financially support their family members. The main benefit, of course, is family reunification. This is a policy and a bill that treats immigrants as people, not as economic units. Family class immigrants are regarded as the most successful class of immigrants. This is not surprising as they are people who are coming in to establish family units with social, economic and cultural supports.

There is no need for the process contemplated by the bill to impact wait times of other classes, which is a concern raised by my colleague from the Bloc, because the government can maintain existing quotas for family and other classes. The government could and should do what is long overdue, which is to increase the staff in overseas visa processing offices, particularly in those that are overburdened like the ones in Chandigarh, Delhi, Manila, Vietnam and China.

Private Members' Business

We all know that Canada is a nation of immigrants. Every single member of the House is either an immigrant, a son or daughter of immigrants, a grandchild of immigrants, or otherwise a descendant of an immigrant. Our families are the direct beneficiaries of a generous and compassionate immigration system that gave newcomers to Canada hope for a better life, where the values of tolerance, freedom and human rights would be available not only to the immigrant breadwinners, but indeed to their whole families. This bill recognizes that history. It honours that history. It breeds new and current life into that history.

The bill would help new Canadians across the country. It would strengthen family ties. It would help our local economies by making long overdue changes to give new Canadians an opportunity to sponsor a relative outside the highly restrictive current definition of family class.

In my riding of Vancouver Kingsway there are many new Canadians who would be helped by this bill. I want to talk a bit about that community tonight.

In Vancouver Kingsway there is a growing and vibrant Vietnamese Canadian community which contributes so much to our nation. I recently visited dozens of Vietnamese small businesses on Kingsway and Fraser streets. These are run by energetic men and women who are driving our local economy with their hard work and entrepreneurship.

Small business owners deserve our support and they talk to me about the barriers they face. They have been hurt by the HST, which we should eliminate. They are having a very difficult time with the recession. They also told me about the barriers they face bringing family members to Canada, with unfair visitor visa denials and long delays in family sponsorship. I am committed to supporting their businesses and improving our immigration system.

●(1935)

Recently, the Vietnamese community held its first ever Tet Lunar New Year parade in Vancouver Kingsway. This was an historic day. I was pleased to march in the parade. I proudly wore the national flag and brought welcoming greetings. I was also pleased to help this exciting event get started by assisting the organizers obtain the permits they needed from city hall.

Vietnamese Canadians have recently held rallies in Vancouver to show their support for freedom, democracy and human rights, and they want these for their families. These are important Canadian values as well as values held by the Vietnamese community. I am proud to stand in the House of Commons tonight and pay tribute to the contributions of Vietnamese Canadians to our culture, economy and society.

In Vancouver Kingsway there is also a strong South Asian community, which has made our community more vibrant, diverse and a better place to live for decades. The entrepreneurship of South Asian small business owners is vital to the economy of Vancouver and throughout the lower mainland and, indeed, our country. Through their energy and creativity, South Asian business people are key players in driving the Canadian economy.

Equally strong has been the contribution of South Asian labour leaders. Courageous trade unionists like Mr. Charan Gill have

championed the rights of workers and made life better for thousands of Canadian families.

Moreover, the Ross Street Temple and the Akali Singh Sikh Temple in my community are important religious and cultural centres. They give back to the community in so many ways, including running important programs for the needy and the vulnerable.

Culturally, South Asian food, music and dance have become integral parts of Vancouver and indeed Canada. From celebrations of Diwali to Vasaikhi, the vibrancy and vitality of South Asian tradition add so much to our multicultural fabric.

More importantly, the values of tolerance, generosity and grace, for which the South Asian community is so highly esteemed, bestow so much to Canada's reputation as a model for the world.

I know that all members of this House would join with me in expressing our appreciation for the outstanding contributions of the South Asian community.

I also want to take a moment to pay tribute to a highly respected member of the South Asian community in Vancouver who recently passed away.

Satnam Khangura embodied the entrepreneurial spirit and hard work that are the hallmarks of so many immigrants to this country. His rags-to-riches story is an inspiration and worth sharing with all Canadians.

Mr. Khangura came to Canada and found work as a cleaner for a company called Metro Parking. Through his hard work and quiet dedication, he was promoted to supervisor and then became a manager. In 1995, he bought the company and ran it successfully for a decade, before selling it and entering a well deserved retirement.

Mr. Khangura was a much loved man in the South Asian community. He was a loving husband, a devoted father and a friend to all. He was a generous and thoughtful man who contributed his time, energy and talents to anyone who asked. He lived a rich life full of grace and honour. His passing will be felt by his neighbours, his temple and the entire community. He lives on through his remarkable life story and is an example to us all.

Who would not agree on the desirability of bringing families together, like the families and communities I mentioned, uniting and strengthening the bonds of parenthood, sisterhood, brotherhood and the extended family?

Under the Conservative government, family class sponsorships are slated to decrease. The Minister of Citizenship, Immigration and Multiculturalism has recently stated that he wants to shift the balance of immigrants away from the family class and reduce the number of family class sponsorships that Canada will accept.

The Conservative government wants to increase the number of young professionals instead of family members. While young professionals are indeed an important class of immigrant, this increase should not be at the expense of family members.

Private Members' Business

The Conservative minister stated, and certainly implied, that young professionals are better economic actors for this country than family class members, especially parents. With respect, I believe this could not be more incorrect. Take parents, for example. When immigrants sponsor their parents, their parents often come over and immediately help with child care. This liberates the two parents to enter the workforce or family business on a full-time basis. The parents spend their money and energy in our economy and perform much work, whether supporting the family or otherwise, which is as valuable as it may be unseen or unrecognized.

Let us talk about spouses. The problem is that the government has done nothing to address the growing problem of the CIC rejecting many marriages based on the mere allegation that they are not genuine or are entered into for the purpose of immigration. I have a number of constituents in my office, many from China, many from India, who have wives and husbands separated from each other because of this system.

Moreover, this government has not adequately addressed the number one problem facing immigrants to Canada with professional designations and training, and that is the lack of recognition in Canada of their foreign credentials. Increasing this class of people before that issue is corrected is short-sighted and ill-advised.

● (1940)

This bill would fix, with one fell swoop, a set of existing problems: the painful separation of families, the undue narrow definition of family class, and the unacceptable and long-standing backlog of applications that make families wait for years to get loved ones to Canada.

The New Democratic Party of Canada is proposing legislation that would help unify immigrant families in this country from coast to coast.

Mr. Devinder Shory (Calgary Northeast, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is an honour today to add my comments on Bill C-566, An Act to amend the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act (sponsorship of relative). This bill would allow the once in a lifetime sponsorship of a relative. As a first generation new Canadian, this gives me the opportunity to analyze a bill that could affect millions of new Canadians such as me.

All members of the House know that the bill before us is not new. This is the fifth private member's bill introduced since 2004 with virtually identical proposals.

Today, one in five Canadians is foreign born and is likely to have extended family overseas. If every newly sponsored relative could bring their own immediate family over, and every one of those newcomers could sponsor one of their extended relatives, the potential number of new applicants would be enormous. I have five siblings and more than seventy five extended family members living outside of Canada. I ask hon. members to imagine what the impact of this bill would be on our system if all of them were eligible as proposed.

● (1945)

The Deputy Speaker: Order, please. I will take this opportunity to stop the member there as the time provided has expired. The member will have eight and a half minutes left to conclude his remarks the next time the bill is before the House.

The time provided for the consideration of private members' business has expired and the order is dropped to the bottom of the order of precedence on the order paper.

It being 7:45 p.m., the House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 10 a.m. pursuant to Standing Order 24(1).

(The House adjourned at 7:45 p.m.)

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