



HOUSE OF COMMONS  
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CANADA

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OFFICIAL REPORT  
(HANSARD)

**Tuesday, February 11, 2014**

—

**Speaker: The Honourable Andrew Scheer**

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# HOUSE OF COMMONS

Tuesday, February 11, 2014

The House met at 10 a.m.

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*Prayers*

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## ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

• (1005)

[*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 have the honour to table, in both official languages, the government's response to eight petitions.

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### COASTAL FISHERIES PROTECTION ACT

**Hon. Gail Shea (Minister of Fisheries and Oceans, CPC)** moved for leave to introduce Bill S-3, An Act to amend the Coastal Fisheries Protection Act.

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

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### PETITIONS

#### THE ENVIRONMENT

**Ms. Kirsty Duncan (Etobicoke North, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to present this petition on climate change, our most pressing environmental issue and perhaps the defining issue of our generation. It will profoundly affect our economy, health, lifestyle, and social well-being. How we respond will define the world that our children and their descendants grow up in.

The petitioners call upon the government to table a comprehensive climate change plan; commit to attaining the greenhouse gas emission reduction goals that are supported internationally; and contribute its fair share to fill the megatonne gap, the shortfall between existing mitigation commitments and the emissions reductions necessary to prevent dangerous climate change.

#### ANAPHYLAXIS

**Mr. Garry Breitkreuz (Yorkton—Melville, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I would like to present a petition from constituents in the province of

Saskatchewan in regard to reducing the risk for anaphylactic passengers. They draw attention to the House that on Wednesday, May 22, 2013, members of Parliament voted unanimously in support of the anaphylaxis motion, Motion No. 230, which states:

That, in the opinion of the House, anaphylaxis is a serious concern for an increasing number of Canadians and the government should take the appropriate measures necessary to ensure these Canadians are able to maintain a high quality of life.

Therefore, the Canadian Anaphylaxis Initiative and the petitioners request that Parliament enact a policy to reduce the risk for anaphylactic passengers that is applicable to all forms of passenger transportation within its jurisdiction.

GATINEAU PARK

**Mrs. Carol Hughes (Algoma—Manitoulin—Kapuskaing, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to stand in the House today to table two petitions. The first petition is with respect to quite a few people who have signed petitions with respect to Gatineau Park. They are asking the government to adopt legislation giving Gatineau Park the necessary legal protection to ensure its preservation for future generations. Given that there are so many endangered species and animals in this park that need to be protected, the petitioners are asking the government to do that.

PUBLIC TRANSIT

**Mrs. Carol Hughes (Algoma—Manitoulin—Kapuskaing, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, the second petition is one that my colleague from Trinity—Spadina has put a lot of energy into. It is with respect to a national public strategy.

We are the only OECD country that does not have a national public transit strategy. It is estimated that over the next five years there will be an \$18-billion gap in that area.

The petitioners know what public transit means to communities. They are asking the government to provide a permanent investment plan to support public transit; to establish a funding mechanism; to work together with all levels of government for sustainable, predictable, and adequate funding; and to establish accountability measures.

*Routine Proceedings*

[Translation]

## GATINEAU PARK

**Ms. Nycole Turmel (Hull—Aylmer, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I would like to present a petition signed by many constituents from my riding of Hull—Aylmer in relation to protecting Gatineau Park.

The park currently has no legal protection. It is important that Parliament pass a law to protect our park, which is a gem, not only for the municipality, but also for the nation's capital and Canada as a whole.

[English]

## PRAIRIE SHELTERBELT PROGRAM

**Mr. Malcolm Allen (Welland, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I want to present a number of petitions on behalf of people across the Prairies in support of maintaining the shelterbelt. The petitioners are calling upon the Prime Minister to reverse the defunding decision for the shelterbelt program so that it continues. It is an essential program for farmers and westerners. They would like to see this continue until they can take it over. They request that funding be reintroduced.

[Translation]

## MINING INDUSTRY

**Ms. Annick Papillon (Québec, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I am honoured to present a petition today regarding the creation of a legal ombudsman mechanism for responsible mining. This ombudsman would have the capacity to investigate complaints; assess compliance with corporate accountability standards that are based on international labour, environmental and human rights norms; make public its findings; recommend remedial actions; and recommend sanctions by the Government of Canada, such as withholding financial and political support to any company that does not comply with standards.

• (1010)

## PUBLIC TRANSIT

**Ms. Rosane Doré Lefebvre (Alfred-Pellan, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, it is truly an honour for me to present a petition today that calls on the federal government to adopt a national public transit strategy. As everyone knows, Canada is the only G8 country without such a strategy.

It is extremely important for the people of Alfred-Pellan, the eastern part of Laval. There are many issues with public transit in that area, especially with buses. As well, the Train de l'Est commuter train was supposed to run through the riding. I know that many people in the eastern part of Laval would be pleased to see a national public transit strategy put in place to facilitate transit, be it for suburban areas or for more urban or rural areas. This is something that is very important to us.

[English]

## FISHERIES ACT

**Mr. Fin Donnelly (New Westminster—Coquitlam, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I rise to present three petitions today.

The first petition is from citizens across Canada who say that whereas habitat refers to the water or land necessary for the survival of all species, including fish, and that habitat destruction is the most

common reason for species decline and extinction, and weakening of habitat protections in section 35 of the Fisheries Act will negatively impact Canada's waters, and quality of fisheries, and the changing of the wording of the Fisheries Act or laws affecting the health of Canada's ecosystems must be based on the best science available.

Whereas it is critical that any changes to the Fisheries Act not jeopardize the ecosystems in which we, and future generations, depend, simply to provide short-term profit for a few, the petitioners call on the House of Commons to keep section 35(1) of the Fisheries Act as it is currently written with its emphasis on—

**The Speaker:** I would remind the hon. member that it is not the practice of the House to read the petitions, but to provide a summary.

I see he has one or two more, so I would urge him to provide a very brief summary to the House.

## PUBLIC TRANSIT

**Mr. Fin Donnelly (New Westminster—Coquitlam, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, my second petition is from thousands of Canadians.

The petitioners say that 92¢ per dollar paid in taxes goes to the federal and provincial governments, not to municipalities that operate most transit services. They call on the government to provide long-term funding to provide access to public transit across Canada and a substantial down payment in the upcoming budget.

## SHARK FINNING

**Mr. Fin Donnelly (New Westminster—Coquitlam, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, the third petition comes from thousands of Canadians across the country calling on a ban on the importation of shark fin to Canada.

## 41ST GENERAL ELECTION

**Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP):** Mr. Speaker, I rise this morning to present two petitions.

The first relates to the ongoing investigation of the calls that were made, generally referred to as robocalls, in 2011.

It is a timely petition because, as we know, Bill C-23 actually has a good regime. One part of Bill C-23 that I like is the part that deals with regulating robocalls.

The petitioners in this case are from the Ottawa area and some from British Columbia. They are calling for a full inquiry to get to the bottom of what occurred in 2011.

## JUSTICE

**Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP):** Mr. Speaker, the second petition also comes from constituents in Saanich—Gulf Islands calling for this House to reject any bill that involves mandatory minimum sentences.

The petitioners cite numerous studies from around the world that mandatory minimum sentences are not effective as a deterrent but actually drive up the cost of the criminal justice system and are unfair to our youth.

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#### QUESTIONS ON THE ORDER PAPER

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

**The Speaker:** Is that agreed?

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

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### GOVERNMENT ORDERS

#### NORTHWEST TERRITORIES DEVOLUTION ACT

The House proceeded to the consideration of Bill C-15, An Act to replace the Northwest Territories Act to implement certain provisions of the Northwest Territories Lands and Resources Devolution Agreement and to repeal or make amendments to the Territorial Lands Act, the Northwest Territories Waters Act, the Mackenzie Valley Resource Management Act, other Acts and certain orders and regulations, as reported (with amendment) from the committee.

[English]

#### SPEAKER'S RULING

**The Speaker:** There are five motions in amendment standing on the notice paper for the report stage of Bill C-15. The chair has received word from the hon. member for Saanich—Gulf Islands that she does not wish to proceed with Motions Nos. 2 and 3.

Motions Nos. 1, 4 and 5 will be grouped for debate and voted upon according to the voting pattern available at the table.

[Translation]

I will now put Motions Nos. 1, 4 and 5 to the House.

•(1015)

[English]

#### MOTIONS IN AMENDMENT

**Hon. Thomas Mulcair (Leader of the Opposition, NDP):** moved:

Motion No. 4

That Bill C-15 be amended by deleting Clause 136.

Motion No. 5

That Bill C-15 be amended by deleting Clause 137.

He said: Mr. Speaker, I would like to begin my comments on the proposed amendments by congratulating my friend and colleague, the hon. member for Western Arctic.

I would like to start by congratulating my friend and colleague the member for Western Arctic for the extraordinary work he has done and the leadership he has shown in this file.

The amendments proposed would delete clauses 136 and 137 of Bill C-15, and it is important to get on the record to explain why.

#### Government Orders

This is quasi-constitutional work that we are doing here today. As the House knows, the travaux préparatoires and the debates follow this type of amendment if it ever has to be interpreted by the courts in the future.

The people of the Northwest Territories have worked toward gaining more province-like powers for decades. The NDP is in favour of devolution and supports the NWT in taking over federal responsibilities in the north. At the same time, Northwest Territories Premier Bob McLeod and his team of negotiators should be congratulated for achieving this significant evolution in the governance of the Northwest Territories.

Bill C-15 would provide the people of the NWT with something that we who live in the provinces take for granted: control over what happens on our land and the ability to profit from the development of our natural resources.

In less than 50 years, governance in the Northwest Territories has evolved from a colonial administration run by a committee of bureaucrats here in Ottawa to a fully elected and accountable government. I have had a chance to meet the members and the premier, to visit them in their House. The evolution they have gone through is quite extraordinary.

Therefore, Bill C-15 is a major step in that evolution, which the NDP fully supports.

[Translation]

For those of us who live in the provinces, it is only natural that we control our own resources. However, that was not the case for the Northwest Territories.

The preparatory work is often consulted by the courts when there is a constitutional matter at issue, or in this case quasi-constitutional, since this will affect the very foundation of how a territorial government is organized.

[English]

Unfortunately, the Conservative insistence that changes to the regulatory process be included in Bill C-15 is contrary to a respectful nation to nation process when dealing with first nations, Inuit, and Métis peoples in Canada. This, for the NDP, is crucial. An NDP government would make sure that no decision taken at our cabinet table would fail to respect first nations treaty rights, inherent rights, and Canada's international obligations.

The changes to the system of land and water boards, created through first nation land claim agreements, are disrespectful to the Dene and Métis of the Northwest Territories. The Conservatives heard over and over from the NWT's aboriginal governments and many concerned residents that they did not support these changes, but the Conservatives, unfortunately, were deaf to these concerns.

However, as a number of first nations have raised concerns about the amendments to the Mackenzie Valley Resource Management Act, we proposed amendments based on these concerns during the committee review, to make sure that Bill C-15 meets northerners' expectations.

*Government Orders*

Our member for Western Arctic tried splitting the bill at committee so that we would not impede devolution but allow for a full debate on the more controversial changes to the MVRMA. Once again, we are trying to find workable solutions, but the Conservatives are up to their old tricks.

At report stage, we are moving that clauses 136 and 137, creating a single regulatory board for lands and waters and eliminating the regional land and water boards, be deleted. These sections would eliminate the current system of regional land and water regulatory boards and change the structure of the Mackenzie Valley Land and Water Board to an 11 member board with a chair appointed by the federal minister. This system was created as part of the implementation for the Gwich'in and the Sahtu land claim agreements, and the Tlicho lands, resources, and self-government agreement.

However, by unilaterally changing this system, the Conservatives are ignoring the spirit and intent of these modern day treaties. The original system consisted of three regional land and water boards corresponding to the three settled land claim areas, and the Mackenzie Valley board for projects that span more than one region or are located in areas where there is no settled land claim. This system gives the people, particularly aboriginal people, of the Northwest Territories a voice in how their land and waters are developed.

It is for that reason that the official opposition, the New Democrats, believes that these sections should be deleted. Let the good parts go through. Have the proper debate. Develop a respectful nation to nation approach. That is the way for the future.

•(1020)

**Mr. Mark Strahl (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, it is unfortunate that the Leader of the Opposition has continued to spread misinformation about the bill. If he had read the sections of the land claims agreements he spoke of, particularly sections 25.4.6 of the Sahtu agreement, 24.4.6 of the Gwich'in agreement, and 22.4.1 of the Tlicho land claim agreement, he would have seen that they all clearly and specifically contemplate a larger board, which is what the bill would implement.

He also mentioned that he spoke with Premier Bob McLeod. The premier is in full agreement that the bill proceed as it is currently structured.

I would ask the Leader of the Opposition why he will not take the word of Bob McLeod. Why will he not let this bill go ahead? It is clearly in order. It is clearly what the people of the NWT are looking for, so why do we not just get on with the job?

**Hon. Thomas Mulcair:** Mr. Speaker, here is what is no longer in order in Canada: failure to fully respect, recognize, and work with first nations. That is part of our colonial past.

As I said during my remarks, we will be backing those parts of the bill that would provide for devolution. That is a step in the right direction. What is a step backward is imposing this type of regulatory model on people who had agreements. It is not because the premier or anyone else says it can go through in that form that we are allowed to simply ride roughshod over the concerns of first nations, and the Supreme Court has told us this time and again.

The problem with the Conservative approach, of course, is their bundling, as they like to do in their budgets and budget implementation acts. They will put some things in that people agree with, like the devolution aspect, and then they will put some things in that they know are controversial and divisive. That is the approach the Conservatives take.

We will take the following approach.

Every decision an NDP government will take on first nations issues will be respectful of treaty rights, inherent rights, and Canada's international obligations. This bill does not.

**Mr. Dennis Bevington (Western Arctic, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I would comment on what Premier McLeod said in committee about the section on the MVRMA. He said:

This is federal legislation, so why would we have an open discussion in our territorial legislature? The federal institution is there for federal legislation. That's what the House of Commons is there for. That's what you are there for. We're not here to debate federal legislation. We debate our own territorial legislation.

To me, this does not sound like a premier who has agreed to and has the support of his legislative assembly for the changes contemplated for the Mackenzie Valley Resource Management Act. In fact, what he has said repeatedly is that we will have a commitment that will be reviewed after five years. What he says, and what has happened here, is that the territorial government has been put in a place where, if they want devolution, they will have to accept those changes to the Mackenzie Valley Resource Management Act.

In this type of negotiation between the federal and territorial government, how does it make anyone feel when we have this kind of heavy-handed action taking place?

•(1025)

**Hon. Thomas Mulcair:** Mr. Speaker, again, I congratulate my friend and colleague, the member of Parliament for Western Arctic, for his extraordinary work and the respect he has on all sides in this discussion.

Of course, Premier McLeod made that statement. It is a reflection of exactly what the NDP is saying here today.

The Conservatives, by bundling these changes to the Mackenzie Valley Resource Management Act, are in fact holding devolution hostage to the acceptance of those changes. We are asking them to play this frankly and openly. Remove those parts and deal with them separately. Indeed, if they have a guarantee for review in five years, let us start looking at what is necessary now.

Every Canadian is concerned about how we are doing resource extraction and water management in this country. The federal government has an obligation. It is not an option. It has an obligation to watch out for the water resources in this country. The Conservatives have not been following that obligation. They have not been respecting it.

*Government Orders*

We are concerned that this is an attempt to force the Northwest Territories to agree to this. That is exactly what Premier McLeod was saying in his statements in committee, which is that they are about devolution. That is what he and his government are trying to get, and by the way, the sections we are discussing here today are our problem. That is why we are talking about it.

I do not agree when the Conservatives try to impugn the motives of the opposition when they say that we should be listening to Premier McLeod. I return the invitation to listen to Premier McLeod. He is saying that this is a matter for the federal Parliament. This is our job. Let us remove this section that has nothing to do with devolution and deal with it separately. That is what the people of the Northwest Territories want, and that is what the official opposition wants.

**Mr. Mark Strahl (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, obviously we will be rejecting the amendments that have been put forward, because they would undermine the entire purpose of the bill, which is to devolve a regulatory system that is modern, efficient, and effective for the Northwest Territories.

This government's long-standing priority has been creating jobs and increasing economic growth. Later today, the House will hear our Minister of Finance deliver economic action plan 2014. Before that happens, the House will consider a game-changing and historic bill that would serve to do just that. Bill C-15, the Northwest Territories devolution act, would create jobs and economic growth for northerners and all Canadians.

Nearly seven years ago, under Canada's northern strategy, our government, under the impressive leadership of our Prime Minister, committed to securing our northern sovereignty, promoting prosperity for northerners, protecting our Arctic environmental heritage, and giving the people of the north a greater say in their own affairs.

We have come a long way since then in implementing this northern strategy. Bill C-15 would help us further realize these goals by ensuring that the people of the Northwest Territories have greater control over their resources and decision-making.

On June 25, 2013, this government made an historic promise to the people of the Northwest Territories and to all Canadians. We signed the Northwest Territories lands and resources devolution agreement with the Government of the Northwest Territories and five aboriginal partners: the Inuvialuit Regional Corporation, the Northwest Territories Métis Nation, the Sahtu Secretariat Incorporated, the Gwich'in Tribal Council, and the Tlicho Government.

Bill C-15 would bring this agreement into effect and would ensure that the people of the Northwest Territories have the tools they need to manage their own lands and resources and to ensure the long-term prosperity of their territory in a way that only they know best.

As the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development stated in the House this past December:

This is a critical juncture not only in the political and economic evolution of the Northwest Territories, but also in the constitutional development of our great country.

Our government wants to help the people of the Northwest Territories achieve their rightful place in Canada's future and become full political and economic players in our great country. In order to

do that, we must first improve the current regulatory framework. Second, we must put management of the NWT's land and resources under local control and modernize the Northwest Territories Act. Bill C-15 would enable us to accomplish both.

That is why Bill C-15 would amend the Mackenzie Valley Resource Management Act to, among other things, establish beginning-to-end time limits for environmental assessments and to introduce life-of-project licensing and regulation-making authority for cost recovery.

Second, Bill C-15 would amend the Territorial Lands Act to improve environmental protection by increasing fines and by introducing administrative monetary penalties for violations under the act.

Third, Bill C-15 would modernize the Northwest Territories Waters Act by introducing life-of-projects licences, increased fines, and time limits for the water licence approval process.

In making these changes, Bill C-15 would enshrine in law not only an effective regulatory system but one that is also modern, competitive, and consistent with other jurisdictions in Canada and the world.

More specifically, Bill C-15 would align the Mackenzie Valley Resource Management Act and Northwest Territories Waters Act with other federal environmental assessment legislation, including the Canadian Environmental Assessment Act and the Nunavut Planning and Project Assessment Act, and would give authority to the Government of Canada to make regulations to recover costs the boards incur while undertaking assessments and licensing reviews.

Finally, reducing the number of boards from four to one would ensure the consistent application of the regulatory framework in the Mackenzie Valley while maintaining a regional presence through proportionate aboriginal representation on the board and through the work of regional panels.

I am convinced that all members of the House appreciate that to promote jobs and economic growth, the regulatory climate in the north must be sound and robust. We must ensure that we protect the Arctic's environmental heritage while giving northerners a greater say in their own affairs.

This is a goal we share with Premier Bob McLeod, who explained during his testimony before the Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development hearings in Yellowknife:

We need an efficient and effective regulatory system in the Northwest Territories that protects the public interest, allows us to manage our land and environment, and promotes responsible development.

*Government Orders*

● (1030)

I would also like to highlight the observation I heard in Yellowknife from Chief Harry Deneron, of the Acho Dene Koe, who contrasted the development-rich environment in my province of British Columbia with the dearth of projects due to the regulatory quagmire in his community in the Northwest Territories. He noted:

If it's not a safe place to invest for those developers, they're not going to come here. I think that's more the reason we're here today.

This is why we are here today, and this is why our government is acting.

These amendments will ensure that the regulatory process in the NWT is strong, effective, and predictable and will attract future investment.

At committee two weeks ago, we heard from Rick Meyers, of the Mining Association of Canada, who reiterated the impetus for reducing regulatory red tape by noting:

Future development in the Northwest Territories will be dependent on its ability to attract investment. Therefore, the Northwest Territories investment climate will be a highly motivating factor.

Unfortunately, there have been various misunderstandings spread about the legislation, in particular with respect to the improved Mackenzie Valley Land and Water Board. I would like to take this opportunity to set the record straight.

It has been implied, in particular by my friend across the way, the member for Western Arctic, that the improvements violate the spirit and intent of the settlement agreements signed by Canada and its aboriginal partners. I would reiterate that in section 25.4.6 of the Sahtu Dene and Metis Comprehensive Land Claim Agreement, section 24.4.6 of the Gwich'in Comprehensive Land Claim Agreement, and section 22.4.1 of the Tlicho Land Claims and Self-Government Agreement, they clearly and specifically contemplate one larger board for the Mackenzie Valley.

Our government has been proactively consulting with aboriginal groups on these changes for a number of years now. The minister specifically empowered John Pollard, a northerner, to undertake the consultation process. Mr. Pollard held over 50 meetings with aboriginal groups, industry, and other stakeholders over the course of his mandate. A number of concerns raised by aboriginal groups, such as representation by regional nominees on committees considering projects taking place in a specific region, were included in the legislation as a direct result of these consultations.

Quite simply, the Northwest Territories devolution act would ensure that the regulatory regime the people of the Northwest Territories would work with would be efficient and effective for generations to come.

In addition, Bill C-15 would also make important changes to the Northwest Territories Act. The act guides the very governance of the territory and acts as a cornerstone of the territory's legal framework, a framework of which the new land and resource management will soon be a part. It would update the authorities of the territory's legislature and would remove the paternalistic role played thus far by the federal government. In addition, it would give the legislature of the Northwest Territories authority to govern for itself its size, oaths, and rules of procedure. It would also give the Legislative Assembly

of the Northwest Territories the authority to manage immigration and to enter into agreements with the territorial, provincial, or federal government. It would also remove archaic provisions, provisions that are no longer relevant to the modern Northwest Territories.

Ultimately, with this bill, the people most affected by decisions would now be the ones to make them. People with intimate knowledge of local priorities, local opportunities, and local challenges would be the ones to have the final word on how public land is utilized, how water resources are managed, how mineral resources are developed and conserved, and how the environment is protected.

I cannot overstate the significance of this change for the ability of the Northwest Territories to determine its own political and economic future. By passing the bill, we can make the people of NWT true partners in Canada's current and future prosperity, partners who are fully invested in the responsible use of their territory's resources, fully engaged in the policy decisions that affect their lives and livelihoods, and fully equipped to determine their own destinies.

I urge all hon. members to support Bill C-15 and its swift passage. Together let us help northerners continue to build our great nation.

● (1035)

**Mr. Dennis Bevington (Western Arctic, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my colleague across, who had the opportunity to hear testimony in Yellowknife in front of the standing committee. It was overwhelming testimony about the desire to not get rid of the regional boards.

He mentioned Chief Harry Deneron. Chief Deneron actually lives in a region where there is no settled land claim. Any regulatory work done in that region is done under the larger board, the Mackenzie Valley Land and Water Board, not under a regional board. In fact, it was quite clearly identified by almost everyone who dealt with the regulatory system that they wanted to settle the land claims first. They said that it was one of the major components of why they do not have success in the Dehcho region, where Chief Harry Deneron resides.

I would ask my colleague if he would explain why he is using this example of a chief who is in region that does not have a regional board, that serves under a central board, as the example of why he should get rid of the regional boards.

**Mr. Mark Strahl:** Mr. Speaker, the testimony of Chief Deneron was very compelling. He spoke about how he currently flies into Fort St. John to conduct his business, and he said that one can see the lights of the development stop at the artificial Northwest Territories border, because the developers simply do not have confidence in the current regulatory regime in the Northwest Territories.

We heard time and again that the investment climate, the regulatory process in the Northwest Territories, prevents investor confidence. That is why we want to continue down the road of regulatory improvement, because we know that an efficient, effective, predictable regime for regulation will encourage development and will encourage the economy of the Northwest Territories. That is what we on this side of the House will continue to pursue.

*Government Orders*

**Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, there is no doubt that good-quality regulation in terms of dealing with the issues of land and water management is absolutely critical for the development of our north, as has been demonstrated even in our 10 different provinces from coast to coast.

The issue in part is that there needs to be the sense that the government has done its job in terms of the consultations with the different stakeholders. We have had presentations from different stakeholders, in particular Premier McLeod in regard to some of the concerns he has. There is no doubt that the economic future relies very heavily on the degree to which we are able to see that development of land and natural resources that might be there; for instance, water management controls, in which regulations play a critical role.

To what degree is the government satisfied that it has met the consultation needs to the degree in which there is an overall consensus, something that should have been striven for as a goal? It would seem, from the outside looking in, that the government has not done its job in terms of adequate consultation, and that is the reason we are seeing some resistance in regard to some of the water management issues.

• (1040)

**Mr. Mark Strahl:** Mr. Speaker, certainly consultation was a key part of this bill. For over 60 years, there has been a desire for devolution in the territory, and when we talked about the regulatory changes, we also consulted on that. I mentioned the chief negotiator, John Pollard, who held more than 50 meetings in the territory with aboriginal groups, stakeholder groups, and others to get their input. As the result of that input, we actually made changes from the original agreement, which are reflected in Bill C-15, where we had regional representation when the board travels. We ensured, based on aboriginal feedback, that there would be local aboriginal representatives on that regional board, so the local knowledge and local input would be received.

We continue to consult on all of these files. Certainly on this bill, on the regulatory improvement and on devolution, we consulted widely. We heard from northerners. They want this bill, and it is time to move forward.

**Ms. Yvonne Jones (Labrador, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise to speak to Bill C-15.

This particular bill is of significant importance to the people of the Northwest Territories, but also to the people of Canada. The final agreement, as we see it today, would transfer the decision making and administrative control over lands and resources from the Government of Canada to the Government of the Northwest Territories. This agreement has been a long time coming. As we know, it was under the Paul Martin government that the first agreements were signed with the people of the Northwest Territories. Therefore, land devolution has taken quite some time to get to where we are today.

Over the last number of weeks and months, the committee of the House of Commons had the opportunity to read through this legislation and study it more closely, but most importantly, had the opportunity to hear from people across the Northwest Territories, from aboriginal governments, to business organizations, to labour

organizations, to mining groups, along with the territorial government itself.

In all of the presentations, what we were able to see very clearly was that people have tremendous pride in where they come from. They have a lot of pride as people and residents of the Northwest Territories. They have a tremendous amount of respect for the land, culture, and each other. That was very evident in the presentations that were made. It was also very evident that these are people who have worked for a very long time to get to a place where they would have more authority over governing themselves, and the right to make decisions in their own territory and lands. It was an opportunity, probably for the first time in their history, in which they were able to bring the territorial government and all the aboriginal governments of the Northwest Territories together to support what was to be one of the greatest strides they would make for the future of their territory.

I also heard a lot of concern expressed by these individuals over the fact that government was not just introducing a bill of devolution to give back some power and control to the people of the Northwest Territories, but it was introducing amendments to the Mackenzie Valley Resource Management Act, amendments they felt were going to weaken the amount of power they had in decision making, amendments that would see a number of their boards amalgamated, allowing fewer people on the boards and, therefore, less input.

There was a lot of concern raised around that particular aspect of the bill, and many questions were directed at the government as to why it would want to amalgamate amendments to both pieces of legislation under Bill C-15. They never got a clear answer as to why that was happening. Nevertheless, a lot of efforts were made to change it.

I want to acknowledge the work that was done by all of the committee members but certainly by the member for Western Arctic, who proposed a number of amendments in committee to try to change this part of the bill that would meet the expectations and satisfy the concerns that existed among many of the people he represents. Unfortunately, these amendments were not accepted in committee.

In addition, I proposed four amendments that were brought forward as a result of the consultations with and presentations from people who live in the Northwest Territories. Those amendments, unfortunately, were not accepted either. As a result, we are here today dealing with what is, relatively, a very good piece of legislation that was a long time in coming, but it has flaws that could have been fixed and avoided, and yet the government is choosing not to do that. It puts everyone in the chamber in a very difficult position, as it does a lot of people in the Northwest Territories.

• (1045)

During those committee hearings, I listened to people talk about their concerns about losing control to the federal government through water and land management, and having to give up seats on the board. I also asked them questions about how they would feel if this bill were to come to the House of Commons, and whether they would support it as it is or reject it because these things were not going to be changed.

*Government Orders*

Almost all the people I put that question to in committee did say they would support the overall devolution and that they realized the importance of that particular piece of the bill to the future of the people of the Northwest Territories and for them to move forward as a region.

What is very disheartening is that they feel this is being rammed down their throats. They feel their concerns are not being listened to, and while they want to see devolution and are prepared to accept what is there, as a last resort, they would certainly prefer to see changes.

They are only asking for the opportunity to have fair representation, an equal voice, and more say, to not be controlled by this particular House or by the government in Ottawa but by the Government of the Northwest Territories. It is a very fair request, and it is a request that could have been accommodated by the government opposite. However, it decided not to do that, and that was unfair.

I want to say that, even after all the attempts that were made by me, the member from the Northwest Territories, and others to make amendments to this bill, to try to accommodate the people and the aboriginal governments of the Northwest Territories, they have been to no avail, and that is unfortunate.

We cannot ignore the fact that this agreement is necessary and important for the Northwest Territories to move forward. We also heard from the Premier of the Northwest Territories and his government. When they talked about devolution and the need to have this bill passed, they talked about the fact that delays in passing the bill would have tremendous implications for them as a territory when it came to resource development.

We know that we do not want that to happen. As Liberals, we want to see the Northwest Territories have the kind of independence it has sought. We want it to have the ability to make decisions regarding the environment, resource development, business management, growth, and opportunity, which arise within their own lands.

We want the Northwest Territories to have the kind of control and decision-making power of which they have long dreamed. We only hope that through the passing of this bill—however flawed it is, as indicated and pointed out—that over time, through co-operation with the Government of Canada, that the territory itself will come to that place where it can have the kind of stability, in terms of decision making, that it seeks right now, and also have a greater control than is currently being offered.

We also know, from our past experience as a Liberal government in negotiating previous deals with Yukon and Nunavut, that it takes time to work through a lot of things that often arise as a result of these agreements. We certainly wish the people of the Northwest Territories the greatest success in achieving the goals they are setting out to achieve, and we want to let them know we are here to support them and help them build the path forward.

• (1050)

**Mr. Mark Strahl (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I hope the member would want to correct the record in her answer. Indeed, the government did accept two NDP amend-

ments at committee. Her amendments, which she claimed were not accepted, were out of order. She failed to bring them forward at this stage, where they would have been in order.

We have made changes as we have gone through this bill. We have accepted some of the amendments from the member for Western Arctic. Perhaps the member will clarify that. The record will clearly show that she did not in fact represent what happened at committee.

The member talked about an equal voice, and I want to give her an opportunity to talk about how the Gwich'in, Sahtu, and Tlicho would all have representation on the new board, how the territorial government would make recommendations on additional seats, and how when the board comes together, it would be acting in the whole interest of the Mackenzie Valley, not just the individual settled regions.

Perhaps the member would talk about how the new board structure would indeed give voice to those settled land claim areas.

**Ms. Yvonne Jones:** Mr. Speaker, I am very happy to respond to those questions.

First, out of the four amendments that I proposed, only one of them was out of order; the other three were clearly rejected by the government members on the committee. However, they were supported by the members of the NDP, and I certainly would thank them for their support in that regard.

The amendments that were proposed and accepted by the committee members talk about the importance of getting information out to elected officials and stakeholders and as well as meeting the need to have as much information as possible from the commissioner, and so on. We support those particular amendments. Nothing in that really speaks to what a lot of the people have been asking for in many of their presentations, which is for more representation on the Mackenzie Valley water resource and management board.

I want to remind the member opposite that I put forward the amendments to ensure that there was more representation from the Tlicho, the Sahtu, and the other governments when it came to this particular board.

We asked not that the size of the board be increased, but that the other three positions be afforded to the aboriginal governments that currently had representation. The government rejected that.

**Mr. Dennis Bevington (Western Arctic, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my colleague from Labrador for her discourse this morning. It was demonstrated at the hearings in Yellowknife that she actually listens to people and hears what they are saying. An important part of the work that we do in Parliament is to actually hear what the citizens of this country say. Quite clearly, in those hearings in Yellowknife, there was an overwhelming desire for people to leave the regional boards alone.

We have not put forward an amendment to delete all the sections within the changes to the Mackenzie Valley Resource Management Act. I think we all recognize that the federal government, in giving more powers to the territories, has a responsibility to hold on to some, and it has increased, in many ways, its powers within the Mackenzie Valley Resource Management Act.

*Government Orders*

Does my colleague think that the people, the citizens of the north, the first nations, would be satisfied with these amendments? Would they be completely satisfied if the regional boards were put forward as the way to go in the future?

• (1055)

**Ms. Yvonne Jones:** Mr. Speaker, it is quite obvious to me that the aboriginal governments are not satisfied with the composition that is being proposed. They felt that under the current structure, as aboriginal governments, they have more say and more control over the lands upon which they live.

What they were asking and pleading for the government to do in that forum in the Northwest Territories was to listen to what they had to say and make the proper changes to the board composition to allow them to have what it was that they desired. In fact, they would have preferred if the board had been left as it is.

**Mr. Dennis Bevington (Western Arctic, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to have the opportunity to speak to the bill, a bill that affects my life, the life of my children, the life of my grandchildren, and the lives of all my friends and relatives who live in the Northwest Territories. The bill is part of our life, and we are the only ones who really are affected by the bill. The bill is for us. Our point of view is very important.

I want to thank the leader of the official opposition for standing and speaking to the bill at what all have said in the House is a critical moment in the constitutional development of Canada. I am very pleased that he has taken the time to do that.

Devolution is well supported in the Northwest Territories. We do not have to argue about that. We do not have to work very hard on that section of the bill. We did get one or two amendments that help a little bit and make this bill more equitable throughout the three territories.

The contentious part is the changes to the Mackenzie Valley Resource Management Act. There is a clear consensus that the one thing that is not appropriate is the change from the regional boards to a superboard. It is inappropriate, counterproductive, divisive, and destabilizing, all the things that we do not want to have happen in the Northwest Territories. These are things that go much beyond the addition of a few extra people sitting on boards that decide the future of the Northwest Territories. This has massive consequences to all.

Our amendment today to restore regional boards is a matter that will strengthen Bill C-15. It will strengthen devolution. It will ensure stability. It truly is representative of the wishes of the people in the Northwest Territories. I urge the government to support this amendment. This amendment can only help to create a bill that will heap praise on the government's shoulders. By supporting the amendment, the government will show its humanity and its desire to do the right thing.

I want to review how we got here, as presented in testimony.

The first step in that was with the McCrank report. When Mr. McCrank stood in front of the committee, he admitted that the idea of a superboard was his idea. There was no one in the Northwest Territories who had suggested that to him. That idea came from him, from an Alberta person who ran the Alberta Energy and Utilities Board. Of course he thought that the structure should be similar to

the one in Alberta, but that is not what we have set out to do in the Northwest Territories. We have set out to have regional governments and aboriginal governments, whether they are Inuvialuit—who are keeping their regional boards, by the way—or the Sahtu, the Tlicho, and the Gwich'in, who have made agreements.

My colleague across talked about contemplation of a single board within the land claims. Contemplation does not mean agreement. Contemplation does not mean that the government can go ahead without full negotiation to change a land claim just because something is contemplated within an agreement.

After the McCrank report the government hired Mr. John Pollard to be its chief federal negotiator. It is interesting that the testimony from the Tlicho indicated that in 2011 they gave the government a protocol framework for negotiating changes to the Mackenzie Valley Resource Management Act. They were willing to work with the government to do the right thing, to make changes, to make the system more efficient. They set out a protocol. That protocol was shelved.

In testimony, Mr. Pollard admitted that it was just taken as information. Nothing was done with it. As a result, governments and Mr. Pollard held many meetings, but they were not in any framework that had been agreed upon by the two elements of the land claims, the first nations who have treaty rights and treaty responsibilities to their citizens and the Government of Canada representing the crown. There was no agreement on how to negotiate changes to these land claims.

• (1100)

That is where the government falls flat on its face.

In the fall of this year, departmental officials then presented bills to the first nations. They presented a separate bill for devolution and a separate bill for the changes to the Mackenzie Valley Resource Management Act. They were never taken together.

Bertha Rabesca Zoe, legal counsel for the Tlicho government, stated:

In that October session I asked the federal officials who were there doing the presentation whether those bills would be bundled as an omnibus bill, and we were never given a response....

Mr. Daryn Leas, legal counsel for the Sahtu, stated:

Never once were the federal devolution negotiators able to provide any substance or details about the Mackenzie Valley legislation in the proposed amendments.

That is the state of the consultation that was taking place on this act, Bill C-15.

The process on devolution has been going on for 20 years. The problem we had with devolution was getting first nations governments on side. Premier McLeod accomplished that for devolution. We have heard the testimony of Premier McLeod. He did not involve the first nations in discussions about the Mackenzie Valley Resource Management Act. He said that was not their business. Once again those regulation issues were designed to be kept separate.

*Government Orders*

Today, we have put forward an amendment to bring peace to this issue. Regional boards are working fine today.

I quote Mr. Tom Hoefer, executive director of the NWT & Nunavut Chamber of Mines, who stated:

We recognize that the aboriginal community is validly concerned by the loss of the existing regional panels. You should know that a number of industry members, especially those who have developed close working relationships with the regional boards, have likewise expressed reservations.

Does that sound like industry is offside on the regional boards? It does not.

How does this uncertainty serve anyone's purpose? We are likely to be caught up in litigation. We are likely to have a new government in a year and a half. Would members not agree? We will have to fix these mistakes that have been made here, because the Conservatives' attitude of ignoring the wishes of the people will eventually catch up to them, and they will be thrown out of office.

I would say to the Conservatives that they should do their job, listen to people, hear what they have to say, and hear what the people in the Northwest Territories have to say about the laws that affect only us, the laws with respect to how we want to develop.

We are asking the Conservatives to listen to us and hear us. Then, perhaps, if they follow that lesson with us, they may follow it with others and they may find that their political careers can be extended.

The north is a great adventure. I have been part of it my whole life. In the end, we will do the right thing. In the end, we will create a territory with a unique and powerful system of government. The Conservatives should join us in doing that. This is a simple amendment that does not change much at all but represents so much to us.

● (1105)

**Mr. Mark Strahl (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, while I do not agree with much of what the member for Western Arctic said, I appreciate his passion.

He mentioned that there will be a change in government. I think there may be a change in the member for Western Arctic in a year and a half, but we will get on to the question that he talked about.

I know the NDP does not support responsible resource development. The member has made numerous comments in that regard.

When we were in Yellowknife, we saw the chart of the exploration funding plummeting off the end of the table because of the uncertainty in the regulatory regime in the Northwest Territories. I know that resource development does not concern the NDP. However, he talked as well about the north and this being a decision for northerners. The Government of the Northwest Territories, a consensus government, voted 17 to 1 in favour of devolution. The premier has said

We need an efficient and effective regulatory system in the Northwest Territories that protects the public interest, allows us to manage our land and environment and promotes responsible development.

Can the member explain why his leader said that regulatory improvement is "holding devolution hostage"? Why does the NDP

not stop holding this bill hostage and let us deliver to the people of the Northwest Territories what they are looking for?

**Mr. Dennis Bevington:** Mr. Speaker, those comments are not really worthy of my colleague across the way, who has shown himself to be quite a reasonable fellow most of the time. My colleague knows that is the only thing we are standing up on today. We are saying that if this amendment goes through, we would be very willing and happy to give the Conservative government accolades for what it is doing with this. This is the area of dispute.

When the territorial premier spoke about the Mackenzie Valley Resource Management Act, he said it was not his responsibility to inform anyone about the federal legislation. The federal legislation, being the changes to the Mackenzie Valley Resource Management Act, was never discussed at the territorial legislative assembly. It was never given air. Therefore, when my colleague suggests that the territorial premier has any mandate to speak about that legislation, quite clearly he said he does not have a mandate to speak about it.

The expression of this affair was what happened in Yellowknife in front of the standing committee, and the member knows very well that the people interested in the Mackenzie Valley Resource Management Act spoke up very strongly and said their piece. I hope he will continue to listen to them.

**Ms. Yvonne Jones (Labrador, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I certainly want to thank my colleague for his speech today on this particular bill. I know it is very important to him and his constituents. He talked about what we heard in all of the presentations in the Northwest Territories, that being the concern over the regional boards and doing away with the process for the superboard, which would allow less representation for the aboriginal governments, especially for the Gwich'in, the Sahtu, and the Tlicho.

With the passage of this bill without any amendments to the water management board itself, what would be the impact on those three particular aboriginal governments in going forward with the work they have to do for the people in their particular areas?

● (1110)

**Mr. Dennis Bevington:** Mr. Speaker, the testimony in front of the committee was that through the regional boards, those three organizations were well represented and those regional boards had delivered environmental regulations in a very effective fashion. That was backed up by the 2010 NWT environmental audit. Those boards were working, and the people had capacity within their own regions to understand the issues surrounding development. That is absolutely the most important thing that can happen for people in a region: to understand what is going on with the development. When it is clearly expressed and understood by people they trust, that will lead to the efficient development of resources, and that is the case. It is not going to happen if they do not have that trust.

**Mr. Jasbir Sandhu (Surrey North, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, it is an honour to speak to Bill C-15, an act to replace the Northwest Territories Act.

*Government Orders*

I want members of the House and people who are watching today, especially those in the Northwest Territories, to know that the member for Western Arctic has been a vocal advocate for the Northwest Territories. He is a native, and that shows in his commitment to the people of the Northwest Territories. He has been vocal in bringing their views into the House and addressing some of their concerns, unlike the Conservatives, who have failed to listen to all of the stakeholders that have voiced their concerns in regard to this legislation.

Bill C-15 would transfer more powers to the Northwest Territories. The provinces already look after their resources and their waters. This legislation would amend the Northwest Territories constitution to allow it to make decisions on local interests.

The Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development said that the bill is holding hostage the development of resources in the Northwest Territories. My question for him is: What has taken the government so long? The Conservatives have been in government for eight years. They are the ones who are creating this uncertainty. They could have brought in this devolution legislation a while ago, but they chose not to do that. We on this side of the House totally agree with the Northwest Territories on transferring power in regard to managing its own resources.

There is usually a little caveat in each bill that the Conservative government brings in. There is also a caveat in this legislation. This movie has been played over and over again. The government brings in a bill containing a few good things, but there are also a few poison pills in it. This legislation is similar.

People in the Northwest Territories want proper devolution. A lot of people in the Northwest Territories are not too pleased about the proposed changes to the Mackenzie Valley Resource Management Act. Of course they want devolution transfer of powers to make local decisions, and that makes sense. We agree with that. We agree with people in the Northwest Territories. We have been advocating for the transfer of more powers to the territories so it can make decisions with local input in its development.

Making one trip a year to the Northwest Territories does not mean the Northwest Territories are being looked after. The Conservatives have had the last eight years to bring this legislation forward, but they did not do that. We are glad that they have finally got it together.

This particular bill would basically transfer administrative powers to control of public lands, resources, and rights in respect of waters in the Northwest Territories. There is huge support among the government of the Northwest Territories, first nations, and Métis groups. They wanted this transfer of powers many years ago, and we are glad the government is going to do that.

People in the Northwest Territories are concerned about the proposed changes to the Mackenzie Valley Resource Management Act. Their regional boards work very well and make local decisions. This bill would dissolve those local boards and put in a superboard that would look after the Northwest Territories.

I would like to quote from a number of people who have expressed concern about the proposed changes to the MVRMA.

Bob Bromley, MLA, in February 2012 pointed out, “The federal government’s proposal to collapse the regional land and water boards into one big board is disturbing, unnecessary and possibly unconstitutional”. He went on to say that “a single board does nothing to meet the real problem: failure of implementation”.

● (1115)

Again, we have seen over and over that when this House makes changes to laws, makes laws, or has legislation in front of it, our responsibility is to consult the stakeholders, to bring in experts and people who are going to be affected. We listen to them, and we make proper legislation that would have maximum benefit for Canadians.

We have seen over and over again where Conservatives fail to consult their stakeholders, people who are going to be affected by particular legislation, and that is the case with this legislation, especially in regard to the changes that would be made to the Mackenzie Valley Resource Management Act. Over and over we have heard from the hon. member for Western Arctic who has spoken up for the people of Northwest Territories, that the people on the ground were not sure whether the changes to this act were going to be made by two bills: to have the devolution bill, transfer of powers in regard to resources and management control over administration in one bill; and then look at changes to the Mackenzie Valley Resource Management Act separately. Yet, the Conservatives chose not to do that.

I have to hand it to the Conservatives here because they usually do not like amendments. I have seen thousands of amendments from the opposition parties being defeated in various different bills. With this particular bill, the Conservatives accepted two NDP amendments and that is because of the hard work of the hon. member for Western Arctic. As I have said, he speaks up for people from the Northwest Territories. We have seen the Conservatives not wanting to make changes that people on the ground want. We have introduced a couple of amendments at the report stage that we would like to see Conservatives support, so they can listen to the very people on the ground who are demanding these changes be made. I am hoping my Conservative colleagues will look at those changes.

There are others who have validated in support of devolution, and which we support and have encouraged the government to transfer these powers. Again, it has taken the Conservatives eight years to get to this point, to make these changes, and we support those because those changes would allow for decisions to be made at a local level, that will have local input, that will provide stability. Of course, it would provide stability for resource development in the Northwest Territories.

Here is a quote from Robert McLeod, the Premier of the Northwest Territories. He is supportive of devolution. He said:

This Assembly has a vision of a strong, prosperous and sustainable territory. Devolution is the path to that future. Responsibility for our lands and resources is the key to unlocking the economic potential that will provide opportunities to all our residents.

*Government Orders*

He said this in June 2013 in the legislative assembly. Of course this will provide for prosperity for the Northwest Territories, and the NDP has been advocating for the people of the Northwest Territories.

I encourage my hon. colleagues across the aisle to support the amendments that we are proposing so that the people of the Northwest Territories can see a change, can see sustainability, can see resource development, and can have their voices heard in this House.

• (1120)

**Mr. Mark Strahl (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I would like to congratulate that northerner from Surrey North for his comments. However, there seemed to be a stunning lack of knowledge on the file, with his speech. The member for Western Arctic has told us to slow down, the Leader of the Opposition said to take it easy, and this member asked why we did not do it the first day we took office, that we should have just rammed it through.

In fact, just the act of moving this implementation one year forward was a herculean task that the department and the Government of the Northwest Territories and the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development should be congratulated for. To say we should have done it eight years earlier is just bizarre.

The member talked about how well the regulatory system is working in the Northwest Territories. Yes, there are some mines in operation, but the exploration dollars are falling off the end of the table. The investment dollars are drying up in that area, and we want to devolve a regulatory system that is efficient and effective.

Is the hon. member's opposition to responsible resource development so strong that he wants to keep in place a regulatory regime that actually discourages investment?

**Mr. Jasbir Sandhu:** Mr. Speaker, there we go again. The Conservatives are making up more of their own facts and figures as to whether we are for or against development. I can assure the member that we are for responsible, sustainable development in the Northwest Territories.

Regarding his question on speeding up or slowing down the process, New Democrats have always supported more resource management at the local level in the Northwest Territories. We have encouraged the government to do that. What we are not comfortable with right now, because of the voices raised at the local level, are the changes to the Mackenzie Valley Resource Management Act. It is very clear that these two different policy changes should have been debated separately so that the stakeholders and the people affected could have had their voices heard and their say regarding the changes they would prefer to the two pieces of legislation.

**Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP):** Mr. Speaker, as it is the first time I have taken the floor this morning, I would particularly like to pay tribute to the hon. member for Western Arctic for his leadership on this file. The Green Party was able to put forward a number of amendments in committee. They were also defeated. I would also thank the member for Thunder Bay—Superior North, who took the fight there.

I am very disappointed by this bill, as I know all members on the opposition benches are. We want to see devolution for the Northwest Territories and the rights and the process that have gone on for some years.

In response to the question asked of my colleague from Surrey North by the parliamentary secretary, of course they had eight years to bring forth the part that we all agree on. What we do not understand is why it is being shoved down the throats of first nations in the Northwest Territories: the Tlicho, the Sahtu, and the Gwich'in. Why on earth would the government take apart these regional boards? They have worked well.

My question for my hon. colleague is what is it that the Conservatives cannot understand about the numerous Supreme Court decisions that explain clearly that first nations have constitutionally enshrined rights that require the federal government not only to touch base, but also to engage in specific detailed constitutional consultations? What about the Supreme Court decisions in Delgamuukw, and Haida? What is it about them that the Conservative Party cannot understand?

• (1125)

**Mr. Jasbir Sandhu:** Mr. Speaker, my colleague asks why the Conservatives do not respect the decisions made by the Supreme Court. It is not only that they do not respect these decisions, which we saw in the House during the last Parliament where they were making laws that constitutional experts said were unconstitutional, but also the very stakeholders the legislation would affect.

I agree with the member on the changes we do agree with. We agree with the devolution of powers to the Northwest Territories, but the Conservatives bring a poison pill in the changes to the boards under the Mackenzie Valley Resource Management Act without any consultation, or at least without hearing from the people on the ground in the Northwest Territories whether they want these changes or not.

The Conservatives fail to see the very changes they are proposing and how these are going to affect the ability of the local people to make their own decisions.

**Ms. Niki Ashton (Churchill, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I am very honoured to speak to the bill, an important bill for our team.

I also want to acknowledge the very hard work of my colleague and friend, the member for Western Arctic. I have had the opportunity to work with him for a number of years, in fact since I was first elected to this House just over five years ago. As a northerner myself, I have always admired his commitment to the people of his territory and, more broadly, to the people of the north. He and I have found common ground on many issues, or perhaps it is that the bond tying all of us from the north together is the recognition that northern people must have control over what is theirs, over their territories, over decisions that matter to them, over their government.

*Government Orders*

I know very well that this same notion has guided the work of the member for Western Arctic, day in and day out in the House, and also on this very important piece of legislation, Bill C-15. As a northerner and a northern member of Parliament, I know the importance of working with first nations, not just working with them in a symbolic way but respecting their rights, their treaty rights and inherent rights as aboriginal peoples, and that their rights, including their right to self-government, are instrumental in guiding the work of the federal government.

This is not simply something that we recognize on paper. This is someone we enact in our work, certainly in our party, and which guides us in our work on the ground. I know that to be the case in my province of Manitoba.

What it also means is speaking truth when legislation comes to the House that disrespects those very rights. I wish I could say that Bill C-15 was the first example of the federal government turning a blind eye to treaty and inherent rights, but it is not. We have seen piece after piece of legislation going after those rights, disrespecting them and the absolute centrality of consultation with first nations. Once again, unfortunately, we are seeing this unfold with Bill C-15.

The member for Western Arctic, our leader, and NDP members of Parliament have said that devolution is absolutely necessary. For years the Northwest Territories has worked for this goal. People have worked hard and the people of the Northwest Territories deserve what so many other Canadians and northern Canadians have, which is a say in their destiny, in their future.

However, Bill C-15, as it stands, also neglects a very important relationship between the crown and first nations directly. Unfortunately, if Bill C-15 passes, the treaty rights of first nations in the NWT, the aboriginal rights of aboriginal people in the NWT, would not have the same kinds of protection and recognition as others, and certainly as they ought to have.

It is not our saying this. The member for Western Arctic is representing people in his constituency, people like Jake Heron from the Métis nation, who, speaking on the consultation process, said:

It's very frustrating when you are at the table and you think you're involved, only to find out that your interests are not being considered seriously.

Gabrielle Mackenzie Scott from the Tlicho government said:

Our key message to AANDC is that there is nothing wrong with the system, and it needs time to grow and improve.

Bob Bromley, an MLA, said:

The federal government's proposal to collapse the regional land and water boards into one big board is disturbing, unnecessary and possibly unconstitutional. ...a single board does nothing to meet the real problem, failure of implementation.

Mr. Speaker, we have heard people from the Gwich'in Tribal Council commenting on their opposition to the changes to the Mackenzie Valley Resources Management Act. They said:

We have a land-use plan. We have a land and water board. We have a claim. People know the process, and it works very well up here. It's only in the unsettled claim areas that there seems to be concern with the regulatory regimes and the speed with which they process applications, or lack of speed.

● (1130)

John B. Zoe, the senior advisor to the Tlicho government, also commented on the lack of consultation:

We're saying we should have a deeper involvement and have a say and have our voices heard on what those changes are, because that's a three-party agreement that was made in 2005.

It is clear that accepting the linkage of the two distinctly different legislative bills affecting the Northwest Territories betrays important first nations.

I want to relate a news story from the Northwest Territories yesterday. It notes that the agreement in this form betrays the Sahtu, Tlicho, and Gwich'in governments, who all worked with the government of the Northwest Territories until they had built the trust to sign onto devolution.

We have the power to stop that betrayal. We have the power and the federal government have the power to deviate from this pattern that the Conservative government has undertaken, that governments before it have undertaken, frankly, since colonization: that the federal government knows best and that the rights of first nations and aboriginal people are secondary, and that if they are disrespected, it is okay.

I am proud to be part of the NDP, which represents many northern people across our country. Our party believes that treaty rights and inherent aboriginal rights not only must be respected but also must guide our work every step of the way. Full consultation is key to coming up with any legislation that would affect indigenous people's futures. We do not tolerate the paternalistic approach of the Conservative government.

While we recognize that everyone in the House agrees that devolution must happen, and in a timely way given the tremendous amount of work that the leaders and people of the Northwest Territories have done, this cannot preclude the work we must do in respecting first nations and their inherent rights.

We are asking that devolution go forward with the exception of the parts of the bill that directly impose on first nations and their inherent rights. We should do better, help create a system of devolution, and support the kind of devolution that everyone in the Northwest Territories wants, and not just some people but everyone, including having first nations at the centre of this system.

I am very honoured to have been able to speak to the bill. I am very honoured to stand in this House and represent northern people who deserve nothing more than to be heard, to have their rights respected, and to have control over their destiny in our country.

● (1135)

**Ms. Joan Crockatt (Calgary Centre, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the member for Churchill claimed that the NDP is in favour of devolution and pointed out that the people of western Arctic have worked for years on this goal. Yet in the next breath the NDP would use the premise of there not being enough consultation to try to derail and stall this very important piece of legislation. I want to point out that the amount of consultation undertaken is never enough for the NDP.

*Government Orders*

I wonder if the member is aware that the existing land claim agreements allow for a single board to serve the entire Mackenzie Valley and that the board restructuring was first recommended in 2008. Since 2010, this approach has been extensively discussed during negotiations with aboriginal groups and the chief federal negotiator, John Pollard. The restructured board would consist of 11 members appointed from candidates nominated by aboriginal groups from the settled and unsettled areas, the government of the Northwest Territories, as well as by Canada.

This bill has seen extensive negotiations with aboriginals and I would like the member opposite to comment please.

**Ms. Niki Ashton:** Mr. Speaker, we have seen time and time again that the government does not actually know what consultation with indigenous peoples means, whether it is on Bill C-15 or other pieces of legislation that affect indigenous people directly.

What we are talking about here is preventing parts of a piece of legislation that directly disrespect first nations and inherent rights. This is not an issue that is secondary. If we are going to support a proper avenue to devolution, it must include respect for treaty and inherent rights, with respect to the Mackenzie Valley Resource Management Act and with respect to the position of first nations in the NWT vis-à-vis the federal government.

We in the NDP believe this is a critical point. It is a non-negotiable point. It connects to our principle, the principle that is very clearly not held by the Conservative government, which is that first nations and aboriginal rights must be respected.

**Mrs. Carol Hughes (Algoma—Manitoulin—Kapuskasing, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, my colleague hit the nail right on the head, in response to the Conservative member's question.

Here is a letter from the Tlicho government. It says:

Canada has failed to recognize the unique constitutional reality in the NWT created by land claims agreements. It cannot be legislated in a manner that is inconsistent with these modern treaties. This is not just about "consultation". It is about ensuring that legislative choices are constitutionally sound and do not breach constitutionally protected treaty rights or undermine the purpose and intent of our Agreement.

We have heard this on a number of occasions during the testimony on the study. I happen to sit on the aboriginal affairs committee. We have seen people come and testify before the committee, and their comments are basically dismissed by the government even though these are the people who are living it on the ground.

Maybe my colleague could expand on the need to listen to the people of the Northwest Territories and whether or not we are going to be seeing more and more Canadian dollars wasted on legislation that is not constitutional.

**Ms. Niki Ashton:** Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague, also a fellow northerner, for raising this important concern that was raised by the Gwich'in.

Not only are we very concerned that the government is about to spend significant money on a devolution process that has some real faults, faults that we could separate from the bill and prevent, but there is also the possibility of litigation.

The government has a dark history of spending hundreds of thousands of dollars on litigating first nations, some of the peoples in

this country who have the least money. Somehow the government chooses to fight them in court, and instead of sitting at the table and finding a solution when the time is right, like now, it will do it in the courts.

That is unacceptable. We in the NDP believe that first nations and inherent rights are integral to the work we do, integral to the work of the Northwest Territories devolution system, and we will not waiver from that position.

● (1140)

[Translation]

**Ms. Rosane Doré Lefebvre (Alfred-Pellan, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise today to speak to Bill C-15.

Before I begin, I would like to thank two people who worked extremely hard on this bill. First of all, I wish to thank our leader, the hon. member for Outremont, for his support and for listening to the Government of the Northwest Territories, the groups affected by these changes and first nations groups. The hon. member for Outremont moved an extremely important motion today concerning clauses 136 and 137 of the bill. I will come back to this point.

I would also like to extend sincere thanks to my hon. colleague from Western Arctic for the incredible job he has done. He has done an enormous amount of work, both in committee and during consultations with the affected groups. This issue is very important to the member; it affects him personally, since he represents the Northwest Territories. He was born there and knows this file very well. My colleague from Western Arctic is truly committed to representing his constituents, which he does admirably, and I thank him for his work.

The NDP believes in a fairer, greener and more prosperous world. We believe in the fair, sustainable and responsible use of our natural resources. The NDP believes that we can create better bills by consulting and listening to the public and to interest groups. We also believe that the best way to work with the first nations is to adopt a nation to nation attitude and approach—not a paternalistic approach.

When the NDP forms the government in 2015, we will honour the existing international treaties. That is why we take Bill C-15 very seriously. Today, the leader of the NDP moved motions to delete clauses 136 and 137 of Bill C-15 so that they can be examined separately from the bill.

No one here is against virtue, and almost everyone agrees that Bill C-15 generally makes sense. That is why we would like to separate clauses 136 and 137. We have some concerns with these clauses, as do the people who will be affected by Bill C-15.

*Government Orders*

We want to ensure that Bill C-15 meets the expectations of northerners, among others, and we will address some of the concerns that have been raised regarding the Conservatives' plan to include changes to the Mackenzie Valley Resource Management Act. Indeed, the problem with Bill C-15 is precisely the part regarding the Mackenzie Valley Resource Management Act.

What are clauses 136 and 137? I want to talk about them for the benefit of the Canadians who are watching today's debate in the House. These clauses would create a single land and water regulatory board and would eliminate the regional land and water boards. All of the land and water boards would be merged to create a single board. The Legislative Assembly of the Northwest Territories is very concerned about this, since the existing boards work very well. I want to share something that Bob Bromley, a member of the Legislative Assembly of the Northwest Territories, said in February 2012:

The federal government's proposal to collapse the regional land and water boards into one big board is disturbing, unnecessary and possibly unconstitutional...a single board does nothing to meet the real problem, failure of implementation.

Existing land and water boards in the Northwest Territories are working well. He is not the only person to have expressed concerns.

• (1145)

Later, I would like to quote others who are concerned about these provisions in Bill C-15.

Today in the House, we are wondering why we cannot debate these provisions separately. That is why our leader, the member for Outremont, moved a motion to delete them from Bill C-15, to study them thoroughly, to undertake appropriate consultations with the people who will be affected in the Northwest Territories and with first nations communities, and to adopt a nation to nation approach to these changes. We must listen to northerners' concerns about clauses 136 and 137.

The New Democrats want to delete these provisions from the bill, vote unanimously for Bill C-15, and pass the rest of the measures in Bill C-15 separately.

I also want to say that we, the NDP, strongly support devolution of other powers to the territorial governments. That is extremely important. I am from a province, not a territory, so I live in a place that has more powers than the territories. Honestly, when I found out that the Northwest Territories did not manage its own natural resources, I was a little surprised.

I would like to go into more detail about how it works with the provinces. For decades, people in the Northwest Territories have been trying to get more province-like powers. The NDP is in favour of devolution and supports the Northwest Territories in taking over some federal responsibilities in the north. The Northwest Territories knows best how its resources ought to be used, and ultimate authority should rest with it.

This is so important. It makes complete sense for the NWT to control its own natural resources.

I am pretty young, and not long ago, I completed an undergraduate degree in political science and environmental geography. During my early university years, I did an internship with Quebec's

department of natural resources and wildlife in Mont-Laurier. I would like to say hi to the folks in Mont-Laurier.

That experience changed my life. I had the chance to work on different projects for an entire summer. Among other things, I worked on natural resource management, chiefly with regard to land, forests, lakes and the fishery. It was a wonderful experience and I learned a great deal. The thing that struck me the most during that experience is how respectful the people who work in natural resources are. The people I worked with had the onerous task of implementing new legislation. This meant taking a completely different management approach to forests, with regard to logging. They took this extremely seriously. I witnessed the implementation of this legislation, and I saw how the workers and the scientists worked together to fully respect the natural resources. The fact that it was the province that managed this directly changed many things in the overall approach to managing the land. I completely understand the concerns that the people of the Northwest Territories have when it comes to how their natural resources are managed, and I support them.

In closing, I would like to say that all the NDP members deeply respect the first nations' desire to manage their natural resources responsibly. It is also important to take a nation to nation approach when dealing with the first nations that will be affected by the various clauses of this bill. This is important to building a world that is more just, more green and more prosperous. Unfortunately, the Conservatives missed something in the consultation on clauses 136 and 137.

• (1150)

I must say that I am against an approach as paternalistic as the one used in these sections. At the same time, I fully agree with the provisions on access to natural resources and their management.

[*English*]

**Mr. Rob Clarke (Desnethé—Mississippi—Churchill River, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I find it very ironic. I come from a first nations background and heritage, and I am very proud of it. I am also very interested in economic development and growth in Canada. Canada was basically refounded on resources and development.

Instead of first nations and aboriginals being held down, the government is trying to give them a hand up, trying to work in partnership with first nations and aboriginals in the Northwest Territories. What I find very ironic is the NDP believing it is a paternalistic approach of not allowing aboriginals to be partners in economic development. Here is what I mean.

I will quote the member for Western Arctic:

We know that resource development hasn't reduced the poverty, and we can't simply rely on resource development to redistribute income in a fashion that's going to work.

*Government Orders*

My question to the member is this. Does she believe that no resource development will help Canada and aboriginals, especially those in the northern territories, on job creation, and helping Canada prove that jobs can work for everybody?

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Rosane Doré Lefebvre:** Mr. Speaker, I believe that my colleague opposite does not quite understand the NDP's position on this issue. We are only troubled by clauses 136 and 137, which we do not really agree with, and they have nothing to do with my colleague's question.

The rest of the bill is extremely worthwhile, and it will be good for first nations and the people of the Northwest Territories.

Clauses 136 and 137 concern the merger of several boards into a single land and water board. First nations are worried about having a single board.

We agree with the responsible and sustainable management of our natural resources. We also agree that the powers it does not currently enjoy must be transferred to the Northwest Territories. That is a logical step.

However, the experts, the Northwest Territories' MLAs and first nations peoples do not agree with the merger of regional boards. That is a problem for us.

**Mr. Jean Rousseau (Compton—Stanstead, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I congratulate my colleague on her excellent speech. She touched on one point, and our colleague from the Northwest Territories also made a good point earlier.

Why did the government not take into account the demands of the Northwest Territories that came from groups opposed to some aspects of this bill? Just like the NDP, those groups agreed with most of the bill.

It is unbelievable that, even today, a bill could be enacted that will affect the lives of the people living in the Northwest Territories and the government does not consider their views when the time comes to make improvements and updates and create a bill that is acceptable to everyone.

It is vital that we consider the people living there when we talk about economic development and responsible development of natural resources. The Conservatives do exactly the same thing every time: they ignore the demands of the people living in the areas concerned.

**Ms. Rosane Doré Lefebvre:** Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague from Compton—Stanstead for his question.

In fact, his question deals with an extremely important point. It has to do with the way the Conservatives draft their bills. The vast majority of members, if not all the members of the House, probably agree that Bill C-15 is a good bill overall.

However, the Conservatives have added sections to this bill that do not have unanimous support and that raise deep concerns in our society, particularly among the people who will be directly affected by Bill C-15. The bill addresses major issues, such as the development of our natural resources in the north and the transfer of powers.

Nonetheless, the failure to understand the regional reality and the merging of the regional boards that manage natural resources in the Northwest Territories pose a serious problem. We need to recognize our mistakes because that is how we make good laws.

That is why we are asking that those two parts be dealt with separately. For once, let us create a piece of legislation on which everyone agrees and let us act in the best interests of the people of the Northwest Territories.

• (1155)

[*English*]

**Mr. Murray Rankin (Victoria, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to address the House on Bill C-15, a very important piece of Canadian constitutional legislation. The bill would amend the Northwest Territories Act. We sometimes forget the importance of some of these foundational statutes. The NWT Act is essentially part of the Constitution of Canada, and we are amending it through this legislation.

Not long ago, in 1867, the Fathers of Confederation had a change made by a statute in England called the British North America Act. That is just another statute. This is just another statute. However, it has incredibly important ramifications for the people of the Northwest Territories, and therefore for all of Canada.

I want to start by saluting the work of the premier of the NWT, Mr. McLeod, for his negotiations and his patience in negotiating an arrangement with the Government of Canada. While I am at it, I want to congratulate my colleague, the member for Western Arctic, who has shown remarkable leadership in this entire process in educating some of us southerners about what this means to people who live and work in the NWT.

I want to start with those words of congratulations. I also want to echo something my friend from Saanich—Gulf Islands said. She used an adjective to characterize her reaction to this important initiative, and that was the word “disappointed”. We must be disappointed at a bill that had such promise, which could have brought us all together in support of this remarkable enterprise of devolution. I agree with much of what the Conservatives have said, including the parliamentary secretary, who talked about the remarkable impact of a bill like this on economic development, jobs, and the future of the NWT.

Therefore, why would I be disappointed? I am disappointed that the government has seen fit to essentially ignore the wishes of aboriginal partners in the NWT, the Tlicho, the Sahtu, the Gwich'in peoples, who all want the regional boards that exist there and appear to function well. They were created as part of co-management, as part of a land claims agreement. They are part of a constitutional fabric that has been negotiated in modern times. They are disappointed that they are being replaced by a superboard.

*Government Orders*

Therefore, instead of being here and joyously celebrating an event that is important in our constitutional history, what we are doing today, as my friend said, is expressing disappointment in the government for once again doing what our leader, the hon. member for Outremont, characterized as “bundling”. I did not say “bungling”; I said “bundling”. It bundled things that we would traditionally all want to support, to stand and salute, with measures that are poison pills, to use a word that my colleague from Surrey North used earlier in this debate. That is why I am disappointed. This could have been a joyous event, but in fact it is a disappointing one.

I have seen those examples in recent weeks in this Parliament. I have seen how, in the safe injection bill, the government managed to find a way to oppose that, and, of course, in the unfair elections bill that was debated yesterday where closure was invoked. That is another example where Conservatives have put some nice measures in that we would love to support, but then they spoil it with things that no sensible parliamentarian could support if they believe in fair elections.

Therefore, I am anxious to see why the government feels it can disrespect aboriginal leaders in this way and expect us to support such an initiative. Do not take my word for it; I am not making this up for rhetorical purposes. On November 18, 2013, Grand Chief Eddie Erasmus, of the Tlicho First Nation in the NWT, said this in a letter written to the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development:

As your treaty partner, I am writing to ask that you reconsider the path Canada is currently on in relation to the MVRMA [Mackenzie Valley Resource Management Act] amendments. ...Canada is proceeding with an approach that is inconsistent with a proper interpretation of provisions in our Agreement and will constitute a breach of our Agreement and the honour of the Crown. This would result in the MVRMA being constitutionally unsound and of no force and effect to the extent that it breaches our Agreement. Canada's current approach will also damage our relationship and create regulatory uncertainty.... We hope this does not come to pass. There is a better way to move forward.

• (1200)

That is exactly so. There is a better way to move forward than to bundle such unpopular and unnecessary legislation into a bill that deals with something so fundamental: namely, devolution.

What is devolution? What would be the impact of this? Essentially, the NWT would keep half of its resource royalties, without losing federal transfers, up to a total of 5% of its budget expenditures. It would get some of the powers that provinces have. It would become a more representative government, a more democratic government, with the resources to do what is needed to meet its demands in the NWT.

Those royalties are just part of what would go on in this kind of initiative. Of the three northern territories, only the Yukon controls its own resources; Nunavut negotiations are still ongoing. This kind of initiative, as I am told, would allow the territory to reap about \$65 million a year from resource royalties. There is about 18% of that which would be transferred to the five aboriginal governments that signed on. Ottawa would send another \$65 million to the NWT to compensate for the cost of those responsibilities, including the salaries of federal bureaucrats who would go to the NWT payroll.

The concept of devolution was originally agreed to in October 2010. Here we are, in 2014, about to pass, perhaps, an initiative that is long overdue.

I agree with the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development, who said earlier in this debate that we need a robust resource regulatory system and better land management regimes or the developers would not be coming to create jobs and economic opportunity in that territory.

However, I am told by my colleague from Western Arctic that when we had committee hearings recently in Yukon, the overwhelming desire was to leave the resource regulatory boards in place. That is something that needs to be emphasized.

In emphasizing that, I want to read from an editorial in the *NWT News*, which was apparently written yesterday, about this very arrangement that we are talking about. It says a number of things, but let us talk about the superboard that the current government insists on making part of this initiative, the poisoned pill that I mentioned earlier.

The editorial in yesterday's *NWT News* states:

Whether Ottawa has the right to create a super board in the NWT is Irrelevant. What matters is three groups of people fought hard for the right to self-government and negotiated in good faith for the right to help shape decisions at the regional level. They have been abandoned by their government.

Accepting the linkage[s] of the two distinctly different legislative bills affecting the NWT betrays the Sahtu, [the] Tlicho and [the] Gwich'in governments who all worked with the [Government of the NWT] until they had built the trust to sign onto the devolution. The Gwich'in went so far as to drop a lawsuit that might have held up the deal.

It goes on to say:

While devolution is undeniably good for the NWT, what the [Government of the NWT] is losing [in return]—regional input, trust and co-operation...—tarnishes the accomplishment.

Worse, this so-called super board is nothing more than a public relations move to placate the global, cash-starved mining industry at the expense of Northerners.

I want to salute the government for finally negotiating a devolution agreement, which is so critical to our country, for the constitutional change it would make to our country. However, I wish it would reconsider what the northerners want them to reconsider, which is the creation of an unnecessary superboard.

• (1205)

**Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP):** Mr. Speaker, I want to return the favour and thank my hon. colleague from Victoria for his excellent address.

For those who have a legal background, as my hon. friend does and as I have, it is astonishing to me, as I made this point earlier today, that the Conservative administration refuses to take seriously numerous Supreme Court decisions.

*Government Orders*

With regard to the elimination of four regional boards that have been the result of negotiation and treaty, that are part of a government-to-government relationship, it is not really a matter of “We’ve told them about it for years, so they should be ready for it by now”. That is not consultation.

I wonder if my hon. colleague would like to reflect upon, based on his own extensive experience in this area, what proper consultation, nation to nation, between the federal crown and first nations, would look like if the current government got it.

**Mr. Murray Rankin:** Mr. Speaker, I do not understand the following. Consultation is not a “would be nice to have” thing, but it is a “must-have” thing. The Supreme Court has made that abundantly clear. In many cases involving the north, and recently involving the Yukon self-government and the constitutional protections there, it has reinforced what it had said so frequently in southern cases, if I can call the Delgamuukw and the Haida cases southern.

In the north as well, the honour of the crown is relevant. We enter into these regional agreements with first nations, we make them part of a land claims agreement that is working well, and then the government comes along and wants to blow it up. That is not respectful, and it is probably not constitutional either.

The Government of Canada has been held to account more than once on the need to observe the honour of the crown. That is a living, breathing requirement of consultation and accommodation.

Many experts have said that this simply will not stand up. Again, I ask why. Why are we here, on what could be the happiest day for the north, talking about something that is so unnecessary?

**Ms. Joan Crockett (Calgary Centre, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the bill that we have here today is really one that would empower the Government of the Northwest Territories. It would empower them to collect all royalties and fees from resources in their territory. That is a huge step forward, and one that they have been waiting for years. The Government of the Northwest Territories would retain 50% of the resource revenues, and up to 25% of this 50% would go to the first nations who have signed on to devolution. This is very good news. I cannot understand why the NDP keeps complaining about it.

The bill is about jobs and growth. Resource revenue sharing is a vital part of developing and harnessing this growth for the benefit of all northerners. I would like to hear from the hon. member for Victoria a comment on the NDP’s opposition to this very important step toward developing self-governing and sustainable communities in our north.

**Mr. Murray Rankin:** Mr. Speaker, I hope I was clear in my introductory remarks when I congratulated the parliamentary secretary for that initiative. I thought I was being clear when I agreed with him that economic development was crucial for the north and that the devolution part of the bill would go a long way in that direction. I thought the member for Western Arctic was also clear in his support for that fundamental proposition.

If I am not clear, let me say it again that that part of the bill is long overdue. Indeed, the Liberals had, I think, 13 years to do something and did not. The Conservative government did, and I am glad that it finally did, but let me say that to add a poison pill that has been so

rejected by first nations and that is likely to be unconstitutional strikes me as absurd.

● (1210)

**Mr. Dennis Bevington (Western Arctic, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, in 2002 and 2003 there were larger numbers on the table from the federal government at the time. Devolution was proceeding at that time with a lot more authority and control. There were larger sums of money being offered for the A-base funding. This whole thing fell apart because the first nations were not on board with the territorial government at the time for devolution.

What we have now is a situation where first nations are on board, and we are taking away one of the essential elements they have within their regional claims. Does that make sense you?

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin):** It does not make sense to me. I presume that the member was asking me the question, but we would rather hear from the member for Victoria.

**Mr. Murray Rankin:** Mr. Speaker, as I indicated earlier, one of the first nations, the Gwich’in, went so far as to drop a lawsuit that might have held up the deal, showing that it wanted to get on with this but that nothing was happening. Therefore, why we would have a bill that would create a board that the first nations want to reject and are therefore likely to want to litigate against becomes even more inscrutable, and for what? We should be celebrating devolution, not having to debate such an issue at all.

**Ms. Jean Crowder (Nanaimo—Cowichan, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise in the House today to speak to Bill C-15. I will not give the bill’s full title because I only have 10 minutes, but essentially we are talking about Northwest Territories devolution and changes to the Mackenzie Valley Resource Management Act.

I want to acknowledge the work done by the member for Western Arctic. He has clearly outlined the NDP position on this and has indicated that the NDP is in favour of devolution and supports the Northwest Territories’ taking over federal responsibilities in the north. As well, the NDP and the member for Western Arctic have acknowledged that the NWT knows best how its resources ought to be used, and that ultimate authority should rest with the Northwest Territories.

However, as we have heard, in typical Conservative fashion, instead having a straightforward, clean bill, we have one where they have inserted changes to the Mackenzie Valley Resource Management Act. That is where the most opposition in the NWT has come from. I am going to spend my brief time talking about the opposition to the Mackenzie Valley Resource Management Act and am going to refer to it as the MVRMA.

My colleague from Victoria has quoted from the article “Devolution dishonoured” from Monday, February 10’s *NWT News/North*, so I am not going to quote from it extensively. However, I want to start my remarks with this. The article said:

While devolution is undeniably good for the NWT, what the GNWT is losing in return—regional input, trust and co-operation, not to mention political integrity—tarnishes the accomplishment.

It goes on to say:

The regional boards, by all accounts, worked with industry and bolstered public confidence that development was being done to the benefit of the people affected.

Those are critical comments because much has been made about the need to improve regulatory management, yet in the testimony before committee and in other comments submitted in written briefs, it appears that the regulatory management under these regional boards was working.

I want to refer to a letter of January 20 to the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs from the Tlicho. In their conclusion they say:

C-15 will unravel the advances in reconciliation that have been made between Canada and the Tlicho people over the past two decades. Canada has failed to recognize the unique constitutional reality in the NWT created by land claims agreements. It cannot legislate in a manner that is inconsistent with these modern treaties. This is not just about "consultation". It is about ensuring that legislative choices are constitutionally sound and do not breach constitutionally protected treaty rights or undermine the purpose and intent of our Agreement.

When we see comments like this, we wonder about the section 35 analysis that may or may not have been conducted by the government and what that analysis might have indicated about potential breaches of agreements that have been signed. I was one of the fortunate people who was in the House when the Tlicho agreement was passed. It was a great day for Canadians. However, when we continue to see the spirit and intent of these agreements undermined by future legislation, it does raise some concerns about the government's attention to the spirit and intent of these agreements.

I want to read from the brief that was provided by Alternatives North and Ecology North on January 17. I want to read from it because it outlines very clearly the concerns about the proposed changes to the MVRMA. It talks about the legislative foundation and states:

The political and legislative base for the *Mackenzie Valley Resource Management Act* is co-management of the NWT's lands and waters, through an integrated regional- and territorial-level system of environmental planning and assessment and regulatory review....

This integrated co-management model arises from federal commitments made in the Sahtu and Gwich'in Comprehensive Land Claims Agreements in the early 1990s. The current version of the *MVRMA* (1998/2005) states in its preamble that "the Gwich'in Comprehensive Land Claim Agreement and the Sahtu Dene and Metis Comprehensive Land Claim Agreement require the establishment of land use planning boards and *land and water boards for the settlement areas* [i.e. regional boards] referred to in those Agreements and the establishment of an environmental impact review board for the Mackenzie Valley, and provide as well for the establishment of a *land and water board for an area extending beyond those settlement areas*...."

It goes on to say that the following:

The relationship between the regional land and water boards and the territorial land and water board is clearly articulated in the land claims agreements and in the *MVRMA*. Section 24.4.6(b) of the Gwich'in Comprehensive Land Claim Agreement (1992), section 25.4.6(b) of the Sahtu Dene and Metis Comprehensive Land Claim Agreement (1993), and, subsequent to the enactment of the *MVRMA* section 22.4.3 of the Tlicho Land Claims and Self-Government Agreement (2003) all state that where a territorial board is established that also has jurisdiction within the respective settlement areas, the regional boards become 'panels' of the territorial land and water board, which is how the system currently operates.

● (1215)

The brief continues:

In essence, this integrated co-management model, since its legislative inception, has embraced regional planning boards, regional land and water boards/panels, an environment impact review board, and a territorial land and water board through which the regional boards/panels operated. The model also includes an adaptive management component through section 148 of the *MVRMA*, which calls for an independent environmental audit every five years to assess environmental trends and the integrity of the environmental management system.

### *Government Orders*

The integrated co-management system, founded in land claims agreement legislation in the *MVRMA* and actualized through public government institutions, has operated successfully for over a decade in the Mackenzie Valley, to the benefit of all NWT residents.

It goes on to outline a number of other issues. However, I know that my time is short so I want to touch on a couple of problems that were highlighted in this document. They are under the section entitled "Problematic Amendments to the *MVRMA*".

The first issue it touches on is the board/panel restructuring. It states:

First, the proposed amendments to the Preamble of the *MVRMA* is a significant reinterpretation of the Gwich'in and Sahtu Land Claim Agreements, and therefore the Tlicho agreement, in that it drops a key phrase. Instead of stating that "[these Agreements] require the establishment of land use planning boards and land and water boards for the settlement areas..."the amended Preamble states that the Agreements "require the establishment of land use planning boards for the settlement areas".

Canada has essentially unilaterally reinterpreted the intent and scope of these agreements by renegeing on its commitment to regional boards. This is an important point because it is where people are suggesting that there could be court challenges because of that unilateral attempt to reinterpret these agreements signed in good faith by all parties.

Second, the definition management area in section 51 of the current act where it refers to the respective land claim settlement area is being repealed on page 100. This amendment means that Canada and the *MVRMA* no longer recognize the distinct nature of settlement areas within the NWT. We often talk about how important local and regional control is, and this repeals that provision.

Third, sections 54 through 57(2) and 58 through 68 of the current act, which establish and define the role of the Gwich'in, Sahtu, and Wek'eezhii land and water boards, are replaced by sections that consolidate land and water management roles and authorities in a centralized Mackenzie Valley land and water board. These amendments dislocate land and water management authorities from their respective land claims regions and diminish the sense of ownership and engagement that aboriginal regions currently have in land and water use decisions.

Fourth, section 54(2) of the amended act establishes an 11 member central board, with one member each nominated by the concluded land claims regions, two members nominated by the unsettled land claims region, two members nominated by the territorial government, and three members, excluding the chairperson, appointed by the federal minister. It goes on to say that this grants the federal minister the right to unilaterally appoint the chairperson, which is not currently the case, where the board member is nominated chairperson for appointment.

Section 56 of the amended act calls for the project panels of three members to be determined by the federally appointed chair, which may or may not include a member from the region in which a project is to occur. In that very piece itself we could have decisions being made for a region without any representation from that region. That just does not seem a logical way to proceed, particularly when this act is being sold as involving more northern control.

Finally, one of the concerns raised is increased ministerial authority. It states:

*Government Orders*

Given that the MVRMA amendments are contained in Bill C-15, which has been put forward as a bill to implement the devolution of land and water management authorities to the [GNWT], it is baffling how certain sections of Part 4 of Bill C-15 result in increased authority for the federal government at the cost of territorial and Aboriginal government authority and/or the authority of northern boards! This appears to be devolution in name only, but not in practice.

That is a good place to conclude.

Although, as the member for Western Arctic has rightly pointed out, New Democrats support devolution, the MVRMA undermines that process by taking away the regional responsibilities that have been working well over the last decade.

• (1220)

**Hon. Greg Rickford (Minister of State (Science and Technology, and Federal Economic Development Initiative for Northern Ontario), CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I appreciate what the member brings to the aboriginal affairs standing committee. I have had the opportunity over the last couple of years to be a part of that committee, and I appreciate the important work my colleague has done. My comments apply as well to the member for Western Arctic despite some rather profound disagreements.

The Leader of the Opposition suggested earlier that regulatory improvement is holding devolution hostage. I find that difficult to believe.

I am sure that the member for Nanaimo—Cowichan was present during the hearings in Yellowknife, where she would have heard the premier say:

We need an efficient and effective regulatory system in the Northwest Territories that protects the public interest, allows us to manage our land and environment, and promotes responsible development.

My money is on the premier's words.

I am wondering if the member could reconcile those comments or clarify what on earth her leader is saying when he says that regulatory improvement is holding devolution hostage.

**Ms. Jean Crowder:** Mr. Speaker, I want to thank the minister for his kind remarks with regard to our working relationship.

Sadly, I was not in Yellowknife because I was fogged in on Vancouver Island. However, I have reviewed the testimony and the briefing notes from those days.

The problem with this piece of legislation is that two pieces of legislation have been combined into one. They should never have been brought together. Some minor changes may be required to the Northwest Territories devolution, but it is broadly supported. Then we have a wholesale change being proposed to the Mackenzie Valley Resource Management Act, which is not broadly supported. This change has not had the kind of consultative process that should have been put in place for a process that would impact self-government and land claims agreements. If regulatory changes are required, they should have been done through a broad consultative process.

Our leader is absolutely correct when he talked about the fact that Northwest Territories devolution is being held hostage to regulatory management. Our understanding is that people were told that if they wanted devolution to happen now, they would have to accept these regulatory changes. That does not seem like a fair and honourable way to bring forward significant changes to the territory.

**Ms. Yvonne Jones (Labrador, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, the Mackenzie Valley Resource Management Act was put in place to set a mandate for existing land claims in the Northwest Territories. This was outlined time and time again in many of the presentations we have heard. It was supposed to be a true co-management regime in the Northwest Territories, negotiated between aboriginal governments and non-aboriginal governments. These aboriginal governments today feel that the federal system is imposing this agreement on them.

Could my colleague tell me what the impact would be of governments' ignorance to their claims and to what they are saying today, if this is not amended?

• (1225)

**Ms. Jean Crowder:** Mr. Speaker, I talked in my speech about the spirit and intent of land claims agreements, self-government agreements, and treaties. This proposal to move forward without appropriate consultation undermines the spirit and intent of treaties.

I want to turn for a minute to the K'at'l'odeeche First Nation, which made a general statement outing two concerns with respect to changes to the MVRMA that I want to touch on. One of those concerns is about the dismantling of the regional land and water boards and the other is about increased ministerial authority.

The spirit and intent of comprehensive land claims and self-government agreements rests the authority for decision making with the nation with whom that land claim or comprehensive self-government agreement was negotiated. This legislation proposes increased ministerial authority, which would seem to undermine the whole process of devolving authority to the rightly appointed people.

**Mr. Randall Garrison (Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I rise today to speak to the NDP amendments to Bill C-15 at report stage.

I want to start on a personal note, my own observations of the glacial progress toward devolution and self-government in the Northwest Territories.

My first job out of university was with the Government of the Northwest Territories, and this was some 40 years ago when the Commissioner of the Northwest Territories was appointed by the Prime Minister and acted as a colonial governor of the north. I lived there for two years, working as the deputy registrar of vital statistics and the superintendent of treaty Indian band membership. That gave me the privilege of working with first nations all across the Northwest Territories at that time. I got to know the young and emerging leaders, at that time, who are now the chiefs of the Northwest Territories.

*Government Orders*

It was also the time that the first proposal for the Mackenzie Valley pipeline was made. At that time, nations were asking for time to get themselves organized to do the training they needed to organize their own government, so they could respond to development projects. What we now see, some 40 years later, is that they do have that capacity to manage their own affairs and are really asking that the federal government respect the agreements they reached with the federal government in terms of local development boards. That is why the leader of the NDP moved the amendments today, to remove the two sections that would undercut the whole purpose of devolution and self-government progress in the Northwest Territories.

When I left the NWT, I returned to UBC to do graduate work in political science, and I actually wrote my M.A. thesis on government and politics in the Northwest Territories and the contradictions that existed at that time between the colonial system and the desire for self-government among first nations in the north.

Staying on the personal note for just a while longer, after teaching for a few years I came to work for the NDP leader at the House of Commons in 1981, and I was attached to the Special Committee of the House of Commons on Indian Self-Government. Once again, I was privileged to work with first nations all across the country in what resulted in the Penner report, which was the seminal report on self-government 30 years ago and which argued that there needed to be a firm economic basis for first nations self-government, and there needed to be recognition, which subsequently came in the Constitution, of the inherent rights of aboriginal people.

We have made some progress in terms of rights, and first nations have made lots of progress in terms of their capacity. However, we have been very slow in taking that through to a devolution of the Government of the Northwest Territories and coming up with a truly democratic processes in Canada's north.

Since that time I have only been an observer, living in a province, as most Canadians do, where there is full self-government and where there is local input into the important resource development decisions. Therefore for me, it is very frustrating to have Bill C-15 before us today in its present form. No one disputes that there are very good things in this bill and that devolution of the powers over resources to the Northwest Territories government would provide the basis for long-term economic security in the north. Devolution is supported in the north, and it is supported by all parties here in the House.

The arguments in the 1970s and 1980s, when I was working both academically and as a researcher on this, were always made that the Northwest Territories was not really financially self-supporting and, therefore, was not really entitled to self-government. Of course, at that time and to this day, resource revenues from the north were assigned to the federal government. In fact, if we went back to the 1970s and assigned those resource revenues as they would have been in a province, then the Northwest Territories was equally as self-supporting as were any of the maritime provinces and Newfoundland. However, those resource revenues go directly to the federal government to this day.

The last time we had a transfer of responsibilities in the north was in the 1980s, when the Government of the Northwest Territories took

over education, health care, transportation, and renewable resources like forestry and wildlife. It has been very successful in running a normal democratic government in the north. Now we have had a 20-year delay before we are prepared to make the transfer of those remaining responsibilities over the natural resources to the NWT. Therefore, this bill does a very positive thing, saying that, yes, now public lands and resources and waters would be governed by the Government of the Northwest Territories and 50% of the resource revenues for resource development of public lands would go to the Government of the NWT. It is not 100%, but a deal has been struck here where 50% would go to the Government of the Northwest Territories in return for an ongoing transfer by the federal government, which has probably been accepted by the north as providing some kind of resource stability, because we know that resource revenues can be quite volatile.

● (1230)

Unfortunately, we have another situation here like ones we have seen many times in the House of Commons. Whenever the Conservatives claim to be rolling out the red carpet, we have to take a close look for the tacks that are underneath that carpet before walking down it happily.

Here the red carpet is devolution. The tacks that are under the carpet are the amendments to the Mackenzie Valley Resource Management Act. That is why the Leader of the Opposition, seconded by the member for Western Arctic, proposed to remove sections 136 and 137 from the bill this morning. It would take out those tacks that have been hidden in the bill.

As many speakers have pointed out, these two sections would take the four regional resource management boards—I should say three boards and the one board for those regions that do not have land claim settlements—and it would collapse them into one board. Then all the decisions on land and water use in the Northwest Territories, apart from those lands that are under the Inuvialuit settlement act, would fall under a single board.

That board would replace regional boards created under land claims settlements that were signed by the Sahtu, the Tlicho, and the Gwich'in first nations, signed in good faith by both parties at the time. Why try to replace those regional boards, which give local voice in development projects, with one superboard now?

It is not really clear where this idea came from. In reviewing the hearings, testimony, and consultations, we see it is not an idea that seemed to come from the north. It is an idea that is apparently modelled on what goes on in Alberta, in terms of approval of resource projects. It is certainly not something that anyone in the north asked for.

Now we are in the situation where, in order to get devolution, the Government of the Northwest Territories has had to agree to an act that includes these changes.

*Government Orders*

This morning we heard the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development arguing that regional boards somehow interfere with resource development, but if we actually look at the facts we see the system seems to be working quite well. In the last year, both exploration activity and resource revenues in the Northwest Territories were up.

More importantly, regional boards work in respecting local rights and in building local support, which is essential for the long-term success of regional development projects.

For me, Bill C-15 illustrates, once again, the failure of the Conservatives in terms of trust and respect for local people, and trust and respect for first nations.

First nations have waited for many years for the rest of us to recognize and respect their rights, and to recognize that this respect for aboriginal rights is essential to achieving our common goals as Canadians. If we want to move forward together, we have to actually do it together as equal partners.

In these two sections of this bill, Conservatives are also demonstrating their failure to trust local residents. Local residents will support sustainable development of resource projects, but they will do so only when they provide family-supporting local jobs and at the same time respect the long-term needs of their communities, whether those are economic needs, environmental needs, social needs, or cultural needs.

In my province, we have just received the report from the joint review panel on the northern gateway pipeline. I was privileged to attend some of those hearings in Kitimat, where first nations and local residents came forward expressing their concerns about the long-term impacts of this project on their community and expressing their very strong feeling that, in fact, there were not enough jobs being created at the local level to justify the threat to existing jobs in fishing, hunting, and tourism.

I think the point here is a parallel one. Having one panel at a national level to review the northern gateway pipeline is similar to what the Conservatives are proposing for the Northwest Territories, one panel to look at the whole region.

While devolution has been long delayed and we would all like to support it, it is disturbing that it has been combined in this case with changes to the Mackenzie Valley Resource Management Act. This could result in court challenges that would further delay the devolution that we would all like to see.

More seriously, it also demonstrates a fundamental disrespect for the land claims agreements that were signed with the Sahtu, the Gwich'in, and the Tlicho in the Northwest Territories. I would like to see us finally reach a position in this country where we recognize the necessity of moving forward as equal partners with first nations in every respect and with full respect for the agreements we signed with them, not to later try to reinterpret them according to some other definition of the words that were included.

•(1235)

**Mr. Dennis Bevington (Western Arctic, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my colleague because the support and discussion that has taken place in this House is very valuable to the people in the

north right now. It will be a benchmark for the future in how we can deal with some of the issues that would be caused by Bill C-15.

If things had gone differently in the early 1990s, we might have had a single comprehensive claim for the whole Northwest Territories. However, at that time, the federal government made the choice not to proceed with that, and it encouraged the regional claims to develop.

We have now been in a process of developing strong regional aboriginal governments throughout the Northwest Territories. One of the fine examples is Inuvialuit, who still, and will continue to, retain its regional boards in charge of its territory.

How does my colleague think that this change being proposed could cause an imbalance in the system in the Northwest Territories?

We have gone forward with regional boards. We still have one regional board. However, the proposed system would very much be out of balance.

**Mr. Randall Garrison:** Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague, the member for Western Arctic, not only for his question but also for his tireless advocacy of northerners in this Parliament, and for the full respect of their right to be treated like all other Canadians and to have a voice in managing their affairs in the future.

I think the member brings up a very good point in that we have an example in the Inuvialuit settlement agreement and the regional government, which is working very well. However, it would be left in place while other people in the Northwest Territories would be denied the same opportunity.

The member points to what we can only call "irony" as it was the federal government under the Mulroney Conservatives that encouraged the development of regional governments. Now, a later Conservative government comes along, suggests something completely different, and begins to dismantle those regional government powers. I think this will lead to a feeling inequality within the Northwest Territories.

**Ms. Joan Crockatt (Calgary Centre, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I want to ask the member opposite if he is aware that the European Commission has a time limit of 20 to 24 months to conclude all of its investigations, such as these regional boards will do. Also, requiring companies to go through a process in which they have to deal with multiple regional boards, as has been alluded to by several members here today, is actually a way of delaying projects and preventing the kind of development that the people of the Northwest Territories want and need so badly.

**Mr. Randall Garrison:** Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for Calgary Centre for her question because it illustrates the problem on the other side of the House.

The Conservatives continually see people as obstacles to development. On this side of the House, we see people as integral to development. If we do not have the support of people, and if they do not achieve benefits locally from a development process, then it is not a good project.

*Government Orders*

Whenever people raise those questions about how development would meet the needs for long-term, sustainable, family-supporting jobs, the Conservatives see that as opposition to development. I think that is a fundamental misunderstanding of what the people in the north and in my province of British Columbia are saying. They are not opposed to development, but they want to know if that development would create jobs, support their families, and sustain the environment in the long term.

• (1240)

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Alain Giguère (Marc-Aurèle-Fortin, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, we find this bill particularly worrisome when it comes to relations with first nations. That is particularly troubling. This is not just about changing a document; it is about changing our attitude.

I was part of the Standing Committee on Finance, and we heard from witnesses representing first nations and the northern government. The attitude was condescending. They were essentially criticized for costing the government money.

These people came to tell us about the terrible things they were experiencing. The suicide rate in their community was unacceptable, among youth in particular. There was a housing crisis that would never be tolerated here. There were issues with running water. In one of the municipalities, people had to boil their water before using it, and that could last two or three days. People here would never tolerate having to boil their water four days in a row, yet it is common for them. There is clearly an attitude problem.

Powers are being delegated, but not all powers, and especially not economic powers. The government is essentially telling the people that land and resource development will be for their benefit, then it is turning around and saying that that development will help lower the transfer payments they are receiving. If the resources are particularly abundant, the government tells them that it will not be like it is in Alberta. Alberta is getting rich off its own resources, but they will not. That money will go to Ottawa.

This is an important law. It merits debate. Many aspects of this law need to be amended. The major problem with this law is the attitude of the people behind it. I sometimes get the very negative impression that the government does not feel that first nations people are full-fledged Canadians. The government is okay with the fact that they are poor. It is okay with the fact that they do not have the political freedom that we have to control their social, economic and cultural environment.

For a French Canadian, taking that kind of attitude would be like saying that, in the days when our parents were called “white niggers”, low-class French Canadians and other things, the people who insulted them were right. That is why the government clearly must not act like that. There is good reason to ask for amendments to the Mackenzie Valley Resource Management Act. Clearly, the resources belong to the people living in that area. Those lands should be rightfully theirs. That is obviously not the case.

We often talk about aboriginal issues. This is one such issue. It is the delegation of authority. We have to invite people to sit at the table. In theory, we should invite them through the front door. Unfortunately, I sometimes have the sinking feeling that we are

trying to make them go through a maze of legal plumbing. Let me point out that things that get into our homes through the plumbing are generally not welcome.

• (1245)

That is the problem. On the one hand, the government talks about democratic obligations, since we are a democratic country, and on the other hand, the government is trying to give as little as possible. We see this doublespeak in Bill C-15. That is why we think it is essential that this bill be debated and amended.

The current devolution process between Canada and the Northwest Territories seeks to transfer the control of public lands, resources and water rights to the Commissioner of the Northwest Territories. However, agreements must be put in place. Canada, the Northwest Territories and five of the seven aboriginal governments in the Northwest Territories have signed a devolution agreement. Two still need to sign. It is essential to continue this effort so that the agreement benefits first and foremost the people who live on those lands.

All too often, those people are basically considered to cost money; that attitude has to stop. We know that the current government does not like to spend money, especially on people it does not like. Let us not kid ourselves. The government imposes the most obligations on environmentalists, unions and first nations. Cutting red tape is fine for private companies and friends, but certainly not for people who do not think along the same lines as the Conservative government. This double standard is the rub.

The NDP strongly supports the principle of devolving other powers to the Government of the Northwest Territories. These powers should increase as the northern borders come down, as those territories are developed and as the Northwest Passage is increasingly recognized as a game changer.

The development of aviation and air travel was already revolutionary, but it is going to intensify further. Now we will build facilities where workers will routinely go—and this is already the case in many places—for two or three weeks before returning to their town or village for two weeks of vacation. This will continue. We will not try to block this devolution of powers. However, we would like to improve it.

We strongly support this bill at second reading. That does not mean, however, that we do not have some reservations about many aspects of the bill, aspects that need to be improved. The half-done work needs to stop, because this work deserves to be done properly.

In that regard, first nations have expressed some troubling concerns about the changes to the Mackenzie Valley Resource Management Act. This is like getting a birthday cake and being told there is icing, but it does not come on the cake. This kind of problem is all too common with this government.

We would like to get to the bottom of things for once. There is a problem, so let us take a closer look at it and solve it completely.

These people are Canadian, and we are happy about that. Well, I am happy, in any case. I invite the government to act accordingly regarding these full-fledged Canadian citizens.

*Government Orders*

• (1250)

[*English*]

**Ms. Joan Crockatt (Calgary Centre, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I cannot believe what I just heard. I believe I heard from the member opposite that the problem with this legislation is the people who are presenting it. Does that mean the opposition's opposition to this bill is pure, unadulterated partisan politics? This attitude of standing in the way of very good legislation because of partisan politics is not worthy of a member of Parliament.

I would like to ask the opposition to work with us to pass, support, and commend very good legislation that would benefit all of the people of the Northwest Territories.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Alain Giguère:** Mr. Speaker, my colleague just pointed out a problem and found a solution at the same time.

Not only should this legislation have been passed a long time ago, but the amendments we are proposing did not come out of thin air. It was the local people who told us that they need to have this legislation. They do not want half measures. We do not want to present them with partial legislation. We want to present comprehensive legislation that answers their questions.

Questions about the Mackenzie gas project are legitimate. They are concrete. This project could potentially pollute the environment and be a major source of economic growth, and they would like to manage it themselves. That is why I say that this government is not addressing the entire problem. The Conservatives are disclosing only what they are required to disclose.

[*English*]

**Mr. Dennis Bevington (Western Arctic, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his intervention. I want to talk about how the Conservatives have hung their hats on the words in these three land claims agreements that the contemplation of a larger board means that these regional boards would be taken up.

Land claims are negotiated between two parties. They are between the people who hold the treaty with the Crown and the federal government, which represents the Crown. If I had an agreement that I am contemplating buying someone's vehicle, would I not think that before I bought the vehicle, the price would have to be worked out between the parties?

This is the problem right now. It is the failing in the Conservatives' logic in their position on taking away the regional boards. They say that because the land claims say that we can contemplate this, it means we have the authority to put it in place without the agreement of the other negotiating party. How does that sound to the member?

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Alain Giguère:** Mr. Speaker, this is a fine example of the problem with the government's attitude toward the first nations.

We cannot tell the first nations that we accept them as a people and then turn around and tell them that they are not smart enough to negotiate with us and that we will determine what is best for them. Therein lies the problem.

When the first nations tell us that they have major social problems that require investment in medical resources, that is not the time to tell them that we are interested in something else and we will prioritize matters for them. No, I do not see that as a solution.

• (1255)

[*English*]

**Mr. Malcolm Allen (Welland, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, it is pleasure to join the debate on Bill C-15 and to talk to this idea of devolution. I want to thank my colleague, the member for Western Arctic, for his work on behalf of the broader constituents of the NWT. I have to admit that I only had the opportunity to go there once prior to my coming to this place a number of years ago. What a wondrous place the NWT is. It is an absolutely marvellous place.

My colleague from the Western Arctic has been very clear about our support for devolution. Let me give it some context in the sense of where I grew up and came from. Scotland also went through a process of devolution. Devolution by its very nature is a difficult process. It is not simple to devolve powers to another entity. It is just not one of those things—

**Some hon. members:** Oh, oh!

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin):** Order, please. If members would like to have a conversation, that is understandable, but I am having a hard time hearing the member for Welland, and he is sitting quite close to the Chair.

If we could give him the respect he deserves, the hon. member for Welland has the floor.

**Mr. Malcolm Allen:** Mr. Speaker, that is very kind of you. Perhaps the devolved powers of Scotland got passions inflamed at the other end of the House.

Clearly, it is a difficult process, as I was suggesting earlier. How do we walk down that path? In Scotland's case, there were two parties involved. There was the Westminster Parliament and what became the Scottish Parliament after the powers were devolved. There were only two entities involved, because it was an act of union between Scotland and England when the two Parliaments came together. There was a historical context, and devolution after the fact could rely on the historical context. Nonetheless, it did not make it simple to devolve.

On the other hand, with the NWT, there is no precedent in a sense that there was a parliament historically that went away and now wants to come back. The powers have been granted because it is a territory without the same powers the provinces have. Some of us would argue that this oversight has been there for far too long and needs to be addressed. It is being addressed with this particular piece of legislation.

Inside of the territory, a number of nations are signatories to treaties with the crown. The government, through the Governor General, being the agent of the crown, has an obligation to speak to them.

*Government Orders*

Some would ask how much consultation is enough consultation. I would think one needs to work at it to a point where the parties come to an agreement. One cannot just impose if there was a previous agreement about how to do these things, especially when it comes to the use of water and land.

I was in the municipal world as an elected official at one point. When upper-tier municipalities in Ontario would try to tell lower-tier municipalities how to use water and where to take it from or where they should put it, the lower tier's ability to decide and make decisions about development would be negated. That is usually what a fight would be over. Lower-tier municipalities would say that they wanted the right to decide where development would be, and the only way they could do that would be if the upper-tier municipalities would give them the right to make decisions about water usage and where to put it.

I used that analogy because that is what is happening here. If we take the right away from the regional boards and give it to one board, we ostensibly give, in the eye of the regional boards, an upper-tier board the right to decide what development will look like, especially when it comes to land use, resources, and water. They will see that as something that is being taken away from them and not necessarily as something being given to them as a benefit. That seems to be part of the issue here in the sense of what we do or do not do.

If we are going to devolve, there are aspects that are highly appropriate. The territorial government in the Northwest Territories is saying that it is happy devolving certain powers, and it wants to head along that path. We should respect that, and we do respect it on this side. I believe that the government, to be fair, has also respected devolving powers to the territory. The government should take credit for that, and I am sure it will.

The hiccup on this side is the other issues related to the regional boards. I would ask the government to consider that. I am not suggesting that the government is saying that it is doing it "just because". I do not think that is the rationale. I think it believes that this is better.

The difficult part is that there are many signatories to the treaties and the agreements. They do not believe that they should give it up at this moment in time.

We would suggest that the government split it. I recognize that the government does not always like to do that. It likes to bundle some things together. It tries to speed things along, and we see it all the time. It tries to speed things along and get things out of the way.

• (1300)

I must admit that the Conservatives did not have time allocation on the bill, and we are grateful that they did not do that.

**An hon. member:** Not yet.

**Mr. Malcolm Allen:** Mr. Speaker, I do not think they will. To give them credit where credit is due, they are allowing us to talk to the bill, and I think that is a good sign, and we need to continue to do that.

My colleagues have quoted from a number of sources who say that we need to talk some more. I understand the other side saying

that we have had consultations. How much do we talk about this issue? I found in my previous life as a bargaining agent that we have to talk it out to get an agreement, because if we force an agreement, we end up with more trouble at the end of the road.

There have been some suggestions, although not by me, because I am not a lawyer, that it will probably go to litigation. I believe that my friend from Victoria mentioned that, and I know him to be a noteworthy person of integrity who studies the law. In fact, he came from my neck of the woods, in St. Catharines, before he transplanted to Victoria. He has asked if they want to head to litigation.

We know how long litigation takes. I have forgotten how long it took the Mackenzie Valley pipeline initially, because it seems to me, and I hate to date myself, that I was a pretty young guy when that process started. It took a heck of a long time to get through all the court processes and to get to the point where it is now. I am not so sure we want to see that again, but maybe that is where this could head.

No suit has been brought forward. The legislation has not been passed, and there is no royal assent. We have no idea where it would go. Clearly, to look at the history of litigation in the Northwest Territories, the likelihood is that it will be litigated. That would be a shame.

The Northwest Territories has said that it wants to head down the path of devolution. On this side, we want to head down that path with them. We simply ask the government to take into consideration the two pieces that we think should come out.

I recognize that it is a big ask, especially at this stage of the bill, but it may well be something that will be of benefit to the Northwest Territories, to the peoples who live there, and ultimately to the government, because if it ends up being litigated, it will be the government that will defend its legislation in the courts. That means that the folks in Welland will pay for the litigation on the government side, because we will have to pay the government's lawyers. That will be a cost to others across the country, and that would seem unfair.

We should respect the folks in the Northwest Territories. We respect the parts about devolving. That piece the government got right. The other piece, not so much. Some folks are a bit ambivalent about it, and others say we need to slow it down.

I would say to the other side, perhaps we could step away from that piece. Take it back to the discussion phase and hammer out an agreement, because I think we could get one. It seems to me that someone needs to bargain this one out so we get to a resolution. The last thing we want is to put the hammer down on someone who will fight back at some time in the future. It would do no good. The good piece we will lose, because the devolving piece will get lost in the acrimony, and the Conservatives deserve to take credit for the devolving piece.

*Government Orders*

• (1305)

**Ms. Yvonne Jones (Labrador, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, my colleague talked about some of the legal implications. I just want to speak to that, because one of the concerns we have is what has been happening with the three aboriginal governments and the fact that they feel that their constitutional right is now being breeched, because this decision with regard to the Mackenzie Valley Resource Management Act is being taken unilaterally, without their consent.

When the Liberal government of Paul Martin signed a framework agreement with the Northwest Territories, it was with the intention of honouring and respecting the agreements that were in place, of upholding those aboriginal agreements that had been negotiated or were about to be negotiated.

Does the member think the Tlicho and the other aboriginal governments are correct in what they are saying and that this could very well be a breach of their constitutional agreements and could warrant legal action?

**Mr. Malcolm Allen:** Mr. Speaker, as I said earlier, I am not actually a lawyer by profession, but clearly, if the aggrieved parties believe they are entitled to litigate, they will go forward with that litigation and ask a group of lawyers to look into it.

At least on the surface, I would suggest that it looks as if that may well be the case and that their claim that there may be a constitutional violation is correct. That ultimately would mean that we would head down that road of litigation.

As I said earlier, the initial issue over the Mackenzie Valley pipeline that went to litigation went on for decades, if I remember correctly. I have to admit that I was a very young man then. In fact, I might even have been a teenager. I do not remember my teenage years, actually. It seems like a long time ago. I am not quite sure why I do not remember them. I think it is an aging process. Some others in this place have suggested that they do not remember certain years because of certain aspects of their life; I am not suggesting that. Clearly, in my case, I think it is just age.

To be truthful, the sense is that the groups believe they can litigate. Normally what that means is that they end up going to a law firm. I would bet my bottom dollar that it would not be a law firm in Welland that takes this on. It would be constitutional experts. This would end up in protracted fight, and that is not good for anyone.

**Mr. Dennis Bevington (Western Arctic, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I want to list a number of names. One is NICO mine; one is Dominion Diamond mines; one is Diavik mine; one is Gahcho Kue mine. All of these mines exist in the Tlicho region. If the Tlicho go to litigation over the regional boards, licensing of those mines would be put in jeopardy.

Right now, worldwide, mines are fighting for capital costs. What happens when the market realizes that the current government has upset the process in one of the most prosperous areas of the country right now for mining? What are these people doing? Why are doing this stupidity at this time?

**Mr. Malcolm Allen:** Mr. Speaker, I think my colleague from Western Arctic hit it on the head. Business needs predictability. If it does not have predictability in this area, the influx of additional capital that may be needed to either expand the mines or keep them

operating can indeed dry up. If that happens, mines can either decide to shut down or throttle back.

As the government has said in its own legislation, this is not just about the economy of the Northwest Territories, because under the act of devolving it keeps 50% of that resource, of that wealth that is generated. If the government causes unpredictability in the mining sector, which generates wealth to the broader Canadian public—because clearly the federal government represents all Canadians across this land—it would actually be harming the broader Canadian economy, simply because it has not given predictability. It would perhaps have actually sent the participants on a path of litigation, which ultimately would end up in a place where no one needs to be, and ultimately the economy would be the great sufferer.

Being the great manager it says it is, the government apparently is about to once more mismanage this economy.

• (1310)

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Jonathan Genest-Jourdain (Manicouagan, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I support the Northwest Territories and its effort to take over certain federal responsibilities in the north, so my speech will focus on some aspects of the devolution of environmental liabilities set out in the Northwest Territories Lands and Resources Devolution Agreement.

There is one issue I keep coming back to: environmental liability. We talked about this when the witnesses appeared before the committee. We have already spent several hours on the subject and the legislation before us, namely Bill C-15.

The stakeholders who appeared before the committee mentioned this aspect several times. It raises a red flag. I keep coming back to this issue, but it is also an issue that keeps turning up in many of the pieces of legislation put forward by this government with respect to the relationship between the Crown and the first nations.

When I talk about transferring environmental liabilities, I am, of course, referring to abandoned mine sites and sites that have been contaminated by oil and other pollutants.

There is just such a provision, not in the legislation before us, Bill C-15, but in the agreement it refers to, which is already available. Bill C-15 provides for the creation and implementation of regulations that will govern the relationship between the parties once everything is signed. The agreement mentions the transfer of environmental liabilities.

Once the bill is ratified and the measures implemented, a transfer will take place. The witnesses' versions differed, but the government was supposed to provide the parties with a comprehensive list of all of the abandoned mine sites and contaminated sites that were slated for rehabilitation, which implies a massive injection of funds. We know that rehabilitating contaminated sites and abandoned mine sites can cost millions of dollars, or at least hundreds of thousands.

This reminds me of the situations that arose from the First Nations Land Management Act, which provided for the same kind of transfer of environmental liability and responsibility upon signing.

*Government Orders*

In the case of the First Nations Land Management Act, it was hundreds of thousands of dollars for sites in Mashteuiatsh. Looking at the specific example of Mashteuiatsh from an empirical perspective, we know that rehabilitation and environmental assessment are very costly. That is why I would like to focus on the concept of transferring environmental liabilities today. Judging from my own experience and my own understanding of the situation, that is the real problem.

I always try to play devil's advocate, that is, to take the opposing position and try to find the flaws in the arguments made. That is quite healthy in a democratic process and in a process of discussion, dialogue, exchange and communication.

Consequently, as part of a strategy based on contradictory principles inherent in justice and administration—this is where my professional background comes into play—it is imperative to forge an argument that will identify elements that could be contentious or present risks that could interfere with the implementation of the planned measures in the short or medium term.

I will introduce the systematic transfer of environmental liabilities in the agreements between the Canadian government and the first nations. In this case, as I mentioned, the agreement states that the federal government retains responsibility for abandoned and contaminated mining sites that were identified prior to ratification of the agreement.

The reason I spoke out in committee was primarily to ensure that an exhaustive list is given to the parties, because I do not want this to be an injurious relationship. However, we must remain lucid and conscious of the fact that sometimes the playing field is not level in negotiations because the government has many lawyers. There is a plethora of government lawyers and, in this case, they were asked to help draft the agreement and the bill we are examining today. Thus, when advising the government, its lawyers ensured that they put the government's interests first.

• (1315)

To come back to that exhaustive list of mining sites and contaminated sites, as soon as that list is given to the government, it will assume the liabilities indicated on that list; in other words, all sites identified prior to ratification will continue to be the responsibility of the Canadian government. However—and this is why the list needs to be exhaustive—if other sites are discovered after the agreement is ratified, it is the parties—in this case, the local governments and band authorities—that will be held responsible for rehabilitating those sites.

I would hope—and this is probably the case—that all parties have received legal opinions as well as a substantial amount of legal advice, but given that the balance of power can sometimes be skewed and that the Canadian government is often in a position of strength and authority, it is crucial to insist on these elements in order to avoid any potentially damaging situations.

As I indicated at the beginning of my speech, when these provisions systematically reappear, often the whole thing starts to look more and more like an adhesion contract. An adhesion contract is a contract in which everything is provided and it just needs to be signed. It is a ready-made contract, you could say. It is something

that comes up over and over, and lawyers always make sure to have these kinds of clauses and measures arranged. The same kind of measures can be found in the agreement associated with Bill C-15. Basically, certain aspects of the bill are strangely similar to an adhesion contract, since they can be found in other matters specific to the fiduciary relationship between the Canadian government and first nations.

The members in the House will acknowledge the preponderance of the authority exercised by the Northwest Territories regarding the use of its resources. This observation must be clarified, however, in light of the testimony gathered in committee, which tends to demonstrate the influence that the government lawyers have when it comes to drafting legislative tools submitted for our consideration.

Representatives of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development, including a panel of lawyers and experts, testified at some recent committee meetings. These experts told us that government lawyers have an influence on—or at the very least, considerable involvement in—the drafting. It is quite possible that the other parties, such as provincial and regional governments, as well as aboriginal communities, may have sought informed legal advice, but we know for a fact that the Canadian government has a whole fleet of highly qualified lawyers. I also want to point out that the legislator is not an individual, but a whole group of people who are assigned to the task. There is probably also a litigation section responsible for challenges of the proposed measures.

All that to say that a fleet of government lawyers were called in to work on this. That is also why I want to put this in perspective, since there may be an imbalance with respect to strength and the prejudicial nature of this whole thing.

Canada is often in a position of strength in relation to the other parties, especially in these kinds of cases. Although I have not been to the Northwest Territories myself, I know that these are remote and isolated communities. They pay astronomical costs for lawyers and legal advisors. I have seen the same thing in my own community. It is often people from outside the community who must travel at a high cost. For example, a return plane ticket for the same day between Uashat and Montreal can easily cost over \$2,000. In short, these fees can be huge, in the end. Private parties, in this case the regional governments, but also the aboriginal parties, probably had to pay out of their own pockets for this legal advice. The Canadian government would not have had to do so, since it has its own large staff to answer these questions.

I submit this respectfully.

• (1320)

**Mrs. Carol Hughes (Algoma—Manitoulin—Kapuskasung, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I enjoyed my colleague's comments. No one can deny that he is truly devoted to aboriginal issues, and the work he does on the Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development is truly appreciated.

*Government Orders*

Can my colleague confirm that the witnesses who appeared before the committee often talked about the fact that the bill should be split and that the authority over the water and land should be individual and should stay the way it is now, since each community has different interests? I wonder whether my colleague can tell us more about the testimony we heard in committee.

**Mr. Jonathan Genest-Jourdain:** Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my colleague for her question.

As she said, the matters addressed in this bill and in the agreement—we have to look at everything in perspective—are quite broad and cover many aspects that might be contentious. I am talking about the integrity of the waterways or natural resource extraction. This concerns a number of considerations, including economic, social and environmental considerations.

Each of these topics warranted a case-by-case in-depth study. Under the circumstances, we were unable to do so in committee, given the limited time that was allocated. For example, these matters were brought to my attention just a few months ago. With my training, I can see that a number of considerations deserved a separate and more thorough look.

**Mr. Jean Rousseau (Compton—Stanstead, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I would like to congratulate my colleague for this excellent demonstration of the Conservative government's incompetence.

Every time there is a sensitive issue, the government tries to take away the decision-making authority of the first nations and local residents. Communication and relationships are vital to good co-operation between the first nations and the Canadian government. The Conservative government fails every time.

I would like my colleague to talk about the importance of these good relations between the government and these territories when it comes to social, economic and environmental issues.

**Mr. Jonathan Genest-Jourdain:** Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his question.

I read the comments and briefs that were submitted to the committee, and it seems that the vast majority of local groups support the proposed measures. Furthermore, we must admit that these groups were involved to a certain extent. That is a step in the right direction.

However, there are nevertheless those ready-made measures, the adhesion contract measures. The Canadian government ultimately holds all the power. At present, the government has the upper hand, and that is why this type of clause is found in most agreements that have been brought to my attention, including the First Nations Land Management Act. It becomes automatic to insert this type of clause.

Instead of fulfilling its obligations towards first nations under the fiduciary relationship that must be respected, the Canadian government all too often protects its own interests, the interests of lobby groups and those of major economic powers rather than serving the interests of the people first and foremost.

• (1325)

[English]

**Mrs. Carol Hughes (Algoma—Manitoulin—Kapusking, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I am happy to speak again on Bill C-15 at report stage.

We are inching our way to the meaningful devolution of federal powers to the Northwest Territories. Bill C-15 would replace the Northwest Territories Act, implement certain provisions of the Northwest Territories Lands and Resources Devolution Agreement, and repeal or make amendments to the Territorial Lands Act, the Northwest Territories Waters Act, the Mackenzie Valley Resource Management Act, as well as other acts, and certain orders and regulations.

In fact, this legislation amends 42 acts that will ultimately allow the Northwest Territories to take greater control of their own destiny, much in the same way that provinces do. It is an important development, which reflects the preparedness of the territory to take on a greater role in their administration and become more financially independent as well.

New Democrats continue to support the idea and have been more than willing to work with the government, and more importantly the people of the Northwest Territories, on this legislation.

The people of the Northwest Territories have been working to gain more province-like powers for decades now. New Democrats stand with them in favour of devolution and fully support the Northwest Territories in taking over federal responsibilities of the north.

As I said when Bill C-15 was heading to committee, there are some items that can be tightened up to address the concerns we heard from our partners in the Northwest Territories throughout this process. It is best that we cross our t's and dot our i's as much as possible, so we can create a strong piece of legislation that makes sense to all involved, as well as an outcome that will be better, not merely acceptable, and will allow the Northwest Territories to grow into a more independent jurisdiction.

We have heard that the pan-territorial regulator for environmental screening of industrial projects is potentially problematic. It does away with a number of regulatory boards and processes that are predictable, as well as known and understood. These are being replaced with a single regulator that will supposedly be more responsive but will also have fewer teeth. This has been very controversial.

We know that the government favours working groups or subcommittees to address more specific concerns, but we do not share their opinion that subcommittees or working groups will have the same strengths as the entities being replaced, such as regional land and water boards.

That is why we are moving that clauses 136 and 137, creating a single regulatory board for lands and waters and eliminating the regional land and water boards, be deleted. We know that this is the wish of the majority of stakeholders who have addressed Bill C-15 and feel the government has to realize that it is the best way to improve this process.

*Government Orders*

New Democrats are strong supporters of the devolution to give more power and authority to the territorial governments. We have no intention of standing in the way of devolution and are committed to working to make sure that Bill C-15 meets the expectations of northerners. They have waited too long for this.

To that point, we must remind this place that many of the concerns we heard about had to do with the changes to regulatory regimes. With respect to the single regulator, it is important to listen to the dissenting voices. Let me remind the House, once again, of previous comments by the Northwest Territory MLA Bob Bromley. In February 2012, he stated:

The federal government's proposal to collapse the regional land and water boards into one big board is disturbing, unnecessary and possibly unconstitutional.

He added:

...a single board does nothing to meet the real problem: failure of implementation.

At the same time, we have to consider how this board will be populated. Given the history of appointments by the Conservative government, it is not surprising that the Conservatives have reserved control over appointments to the environmental review board and also maintained control over the approval of licences.

What we get with that is something like devolution with strings attached, or devolution in name only, if the real power is still dependent on decisions from the minister's desk and his or her hand-picked appointees.

• (1330)

We also have to ask whether this superboard should not fall into place after outstanding land claims have been settled. Is this not a case of reaching further than necessary on one item and not challenging ourselves on another front?

That said, devolution is going to happen, and this will give Northwest Territories residents a greater voice in decisions relating to their economy and environmental protection, even if they do come with strings attached.

If the Conservative government is not prepared to support the changes brought forward by the NDP motion today that reflect the voices of those directly impacted, rest assured, these are matters that the NDP will consider tackling when we form government in 2015.

The NDP recognizes that the proposed legislation before us does some important work that is welcomed as well. The bill would fix the current scheme so that the government of the Northwest Territories would start to receive revenues from resource development and rely less on federal transfer payments and taxes to deliver public programs and services. Under the new agreement, it would keep 50% of the revenues collected from resource development on public land, up to a maximum amount that is pegged to its operating cost or gross expenditure base, and the Government of Canada would retain the remainder.

This means that the arrangement would help to generate extra money for the territories other than what is currently provided for by the federal government. However, as we have noted before, it would require resources development to proceed. It is only reasonable for us to assume that development would take place and that those monies would become available.

This is a part of the bill that makes sense, but the strength of certain parts of legislation does not create the authority to ram through the remainder without attempting to tighten up contentious items; otherwise, we would be stuck in a cycle of amending what has been overlooked. As I said, we would be prepared to do that in 2015 when we form the government.

It is true that there is a danger that we could be constantly locked in discussion mode with no action, if it remains the same. However, we have to recognize that it is just as dangerous to consult and ignore.

The Conservative government's ability to listen has been proven to be quite a challenge. It is just as challenging that the voices it is hearing from are not entirely supportive of its initiatives. In those instances, it seems particularly hard for the government to recognize when it does share goals with stakeholders who may have specific criticism or can see a different way to approach that shared goal. That is a shame. I believe it over-politicizes processes and demonizes the voices of honest criticism. We hope that is not the case with stakeholders from the Northwest Territories who can imagine other and better ways to pursue devolution.

To return to the larger concept of devolution, we have to ask ourselves if we are pursuing this in name more than in action. We also have to ask what we want from the process, what a best outcome might and should look like.

We can look at other jurisdictions, as well as the history of devolution in Canada. Surely, the heart of the matter has to do with improving independence and the ability of local populations to control their own lives. To ensure that is the outcome, it is imperative to listen to the voices of people who would navigate the new arrangement that we are debating. This is all the more true for the voices of first nations, who are significant players in this.

Unfortunately for the Conservative government, its record on that front is less than stellar. When people like Jake Heron of the Northwest Territories Métis Nation tells us, and I quote, "It's very frustrating when you are at the table and you think you're involved, only to find out that your interests are not being considered seriously", we have to understand how that is a red flag in this process.

Also, the lukewarm acceptance of the amendments to the Mackenzie Valley Resource Management Act, which would create the environmental screening process for the Northwest Territories, must be viewed for what they are. They are an acceptance that this is the best they are going to get from this government, and not any ringing endorsement.

*Government Orders*

We know that the Gwich'in Tribal Council and the Tlicho government, along with other individual first nations, have publicly voiced concerns on these changes to the MVRMA. Therefore, it is possible to view the signatures of the Gwich'in Tribal Council and the Tlicho government on the devolution agreement as being an incomplete endorsement.

With that in mind, we will continue to work on the bill, as members saw today, to make sure that Bill C-15 meets northerners' expectations.

• (1335)

**Ms. Joan Crockatt (Calgary Centre, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, one of the words the member for Algoma—Manitoulin—Kapuska used, while very supportive of the idea of devolution, was “inching” toward devolution of powers in the Northwest Territories. I want to talk about that inching along, because some of the things proposed by the NDP today would slow down that process.

I want to specifically talk about the idea that there should be more bodies that people have to consult with. This theme of constant consultation seems to come from the NDP. I want to remind New Democrats that the Mackenzie Valley pipeline process was absolutely derailed by 21 years of consultations. By the time it was finally approved, the U.S. no longer needed the natural gas from that area, depriving it of the opportunity to take advantage of that development.

I want to ask the members opposite if they are aware that there will be no resource development in the north if the processes are too long and cumbersome, which is something this bill would fix.

**Mrs. Carol Hughes:** Mr. Speaker, the reason it took so long is they were not quite ready and there were still things to iron out. The government's definition of consultation is not the same as first nations' definition of consultation. The member needs to keep that in mind.

Earlier today I read a statement by the Tlicho Nation, dated January 20, 2014. Again, I will remind the member that the Tlicho are the people actually on the ground. It stated:

...Canada is proceeding with an approach that is inconsistent with a proper interpretation of provisions in our Agreement and will constitute a breach of our Agreement and the honour of the Crown.

My question to the member in response to this, if she could have answered, is this. Why are the Conservatives prepared to go to court over something that will show that this legislation is likely unconstitutional?

**Ms. Yvonne Jones (Labrador, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, my colleague quoted from a document by the Tlicho nation, in which it outlined to the government that it feels its constitutional rights as an aboriginal government are being infringed on. The Tlicho nation feels that the government is unilaterally making changes, within the claim and within the agreement, that are not favourable to it. It also implied that those changes violate the constitutional promises that were given to it by the Government of Canada.

My colleague sat through a lot of the discussion in committee with regard to this particular bill. Does she feel that the Tlicho nation and the other aboriginal groups, like the Sahtu and the Gwich'in, have a legitimate case? With the government being uncooperative in

accepting any amendments, would she be supportive of their pursuing legal action on this?

**Mrs. Carol Hughes:** Mr. Speaker, obviously, the Tlicho, the Gwich'in, and the Sahtu all believe that they have a case and I would leave it up to their lawyers to decide to move forward on this. That same thing resounded throughout the testimony, with respect to the lands and water boards and the fact that this should have been two different pieces of legislation.

I want to mention that the document I referred to a while ago was dated November 18, 2013, and the previous one was January 20, 2014. I now have an article dated February 20, 2014, in the *Northwest Territories News/North*, which states:

Accepting the linkage of the two distinctly different legislative bills affecting the NWT betrays the Sahtu, Tlicho and Gwich'in governments who all worked with the GNWT until they had built the trust to sign onto the devolution.

Now, there is a question as to whether this was done intentionally and what impact this will have on their relationship.

• (1340)

**Ms. Linda Duncan (Edmonton—Strathcona, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the opportunity to rise to speak to the bill. I know this legislation is of great import not only to the Northwest Territories but also to the first nations of that area of our country. As the House is well aware, there has been considerable support across the Northwest Territories for the first part of the bill, which is, finally, the devolution of additional powers to the Northwest Territories government and to the first nations to be shared.

In Canada's north, there are not just two jurisdictions, there are three jurisdictions: the territorial government, the federal government, and the first nation governments. In this place, we always have to keep that in mind when legislation is coming forward that may impact on each of those three orders of government.

I understand there is a high level of support by the first nations. They like the fact that the north is finally moving toward a jurisdiction of independence and self-government. There are probably still some issues to be worked out between the federal government and the other two orders of government. I know from when I was assistant deputy of resources in the Yukon that it was one thing to negotiate and reach agreement on the legislation which would devolve these authorities, but it was another thing to reach agreement on the person years and the resources that would transfer from the federal government to the territorial and, potentially, to the first nation governments.

We in this place can only hope that with this devolution also comes the fair transfer of resources so that those orders of government can effectively and efficiently deliver those responsibilities in the same way that the federal government previously might have, even if it had shared those responsibilities. That is always something to keep in mind. It is one thing to debate and bring forward legislation, but it is another thing to make sure that there is appropriate transfer and sharing of resources to ensure that this occurs in an effective way.

*Government Orders*

When I spoke to the bill in the previous reading, I made it clear that those I heard from in the north, the concern that they hold is in the second part of the bill. There are many in the north who had implored the government to separate these bills and have them debated and voted on separately. That would have made it much easier for all members of this place to say resoundingly, absolutely, that it is up to the territorial government to decide how it resolves these issues. We could have looked at this closely, with careful scrutiny, and decided that, yes, we are in favour of this.

Regrettably, the government, in its stubborn will, has again chosen to combine two matters that really merit separate discussion.

As some of my colleagues in the House have mentioned, there is a strong likelihood that the passage of this legislation may trigger litigation by all three first nations in the Northwest Territories: the Sahtu, the Gwich'in, and the Tlicho, all of whom have first nation final agreements, self-government final agreements, that were not only negotiated and signed off among those three first nation governments but also with the territorial government and the federal government. Those agreements, as with all the first nation final agreements, are constitutionally entrenched. Therefore, deservedly, these first nations are raising clear, well-grounded issues.

By what right does the federal government have to unilaterally reopen a first nation final agreement without sitting down and discussing the procedures set forth in that agreement? It is my understanding that the real contention is in the second agreement, which has to do with land use, land use development, land use planning, and land use approvals.

The legislation that stands right now, prior to this bill, established three separate land use regimes for the Northwest Territories, one for each first nation, because there is a clear recognition that each of those first nation governments has the right of governance. The people of each of those first nations have the right to a direct say in decisions about land use and water management in their regions.

• (1345)

It is my understanding that even within those first nation final agreements, where the separate water boards, the separate land use boards, and all the provisions are set out, there is allowance for discussion about moving toward a more consolidated approach. That allows for the beginning of the discussion, the negotiations, and the consent by those first nations, none of which, as I understand, has occurred to the satisfaction of those three first nation governments.

We have here what appears to be strong allegations of a violation of the existing legislation, the requirement for advanced consultation and agreement from that negotiation process. We are hearing from those three first nations that should this legislation go through, they will clearly contemplate litigation.

I have to attest to the fact that an analysis has recently come to my attention that of all the legal actions coming forward by first nations dealing with resource management, almost every one of those cases is won by the first nations. What we are foreseeing is, if not an overthrow eventually, or an order of the court to go back and take a second look, at least considerable delay.

If we go back to successive speeches from the throne by the government, it has said over and over again, not just for the north of

Canada but across Canada, that its objective is to streamline, in other words, to fast-track resource extraction, development, and export.

The government has heard the message from those first nations that should this legislation go through, they will contemplate litigation against it and, given that we know from experience that in all cases, the government proceeds at all appellate levels, we can foresee there will be a lot of delay in the eventual implementation of this legislation.

The last thing we need for investment and development in the north is uncertainty. That is one thing that investors do not want. Wherever they look around the globe, they question where they should invest their dollars. They do not want to invest those dollars where there is uncertainty. Certainly, this uncertainty must be hanging over the three to four diamond mines proposed in the Tlicho territory.

It is a complete puzzle to me and to my colleagues why the government did not, first of all, separate out these bills, to allow for much deeper consultation, perhaps provide an option such as moving toward a superboard, and if there were a superboard, how we would ensure that each of the three first nations would be similarly accommodated and heard.

If we look at the provisions in the Gwich'in first nation final agreement, under section 24, "Land and Water Regulation", it clearly states that "Legislation shall provide for co-ordination of the activities of the boards...", that "Each of the boards...shall be established...", and "may establish its own rules of procedure...".

Most particularly, and this was the concern of these first nations, it states:

The legislation implementing the provisions of this chapter shall provide for a method of monitoring the cumulative impact of land and water uses on the environment in the Mackenzie Valley, and for periodic, independent, environmental audits which shall be made public.

All of these provisions relate to the terms of reference and the operation of these distinct land and water boards and authorities for these first nations. Is the baby being thrown out with the bathwater?

I hope that all members of the House will give due consideration to voting for the amendment that the official opposition put forward. We think it is a reasonable amendment. It will not hold up the rest of the legislation, which is welcomed by those in the north, and Canadians and investors across the country. We ask that this amendment be accepted.

**Ms. Joan Crockatt (Calgary Centre, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I was particularly struck by the comment made by the member for Edmonton—Strathcona, that the bill has received a high level of support from first nations. It is important that we understand that there will never be 100% agreement on anything. We do not demand unanimity from any group in our society, but we do want to help the north realize its aspirations.

*Government Orders*

This idea of board restructuring is absolutely critical to the success of this endeavour. Currently, there are four land and water boards for the Mackenzie Valley, but with the settlement of future land claims, this could lead to an increase in the number of regulatory panels, adding to the complexity, uncertainty, and cost of the regulatory regime. The member talked about a certainty for development. Moving to one water and land board would enable certainty for companies and enable the north to realize its aspirations.

I would like the member to comment on the fact that we do not demand unanimity but we respectfully accept that there will be people who disagree.

• (1350)

**Ms. Linda Duncan:** Mr. Speaker, in the debate, it has been very clear that there has been support from the first nations in favour of devolution. What they are opposed to is the imposition of the superboard. This is not a minor matter. It is not a case of their getting everything else, but not this.

The point in principle here is that the current regime was negotiated in good faith and signed off on in good faith by all parties. The Conservative government has now unilaterally decided to throw out and tear up this agreement, which is constitutionally entrenched. That is the point.

It is going to make all first nations that are currently negotiating first nations final agreements think twice about entering into these kinds of negotiations.

**Ms. Yvonne Jones (Labrador, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, we certainly agree with the member for Edmonton—Strathcona. We attended consultations with the aboriginal groups and others in the Northwest Territories and heard first-hand what their concerns were. In her remarks, the member talked about how the Gwich'in, the Sahtu, and the Tlicho would be affected in terms of what they feel are their constitutional rights under this agreement.

One of the other groups that presented to us, on which I did not hear the member comment, was the NWT and Nunavut Chamber of Mines. The chamber was very concerned that this bill, as it was written, would have a negative impact on the mining industry and discourage exploration spending in the Northwest Territories. It asked for certain changes that would have been cohesive with environmental regulations and asked that these amendments be made, which we did at the committee level, but the government rejected them.

I would like to ask the minister if this is something the NDP would support and would like to see corrected if there were a time when this bill could be redone.

**Ms. Linda Duncan:** Mr. Speaker, I am always happy to be called a minister, although being a chief was my favourite moniker.

The member makes a good point. I will not speak to the specific amendments. I know there were a number of amendments that came forward at committee. It is always discouraging that those are roundly rejected, particularly when we have witnesses come in, particularly witnesses who would be directly impacted by the proposed legislation.

As I mentioned in my brief remarks, the most important thing for attracting investment is to have certainty. We already have active diamond mines and other mines in the north. All of a sudden, we are changing the rules of engagement and we have the first nations saying that they will litigate if this goes forward. I do not think that the chamber of mines would be any happier than any other investor taking a look at this.

Very clearly, the Gwich'in Tribal Council has said it supports the devolution part but rejects the second part of the bill with the MVRMA amendments. That is very clear. It is on the record. It had hoped that the government would listen to common sense.

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Annick Papillon (Québec, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I am greatly honoured to rise in the House to speak to Bill C-15, which proposes reforming the constitution of the Northwest Territories and amends legislation regarding the creation of boards that govern land and water use in the Northwest Territories.

On December 3, 2013, the Government of Canada introduced Bill C-15, which was developed after years of consultation, notably with aboriginal groups, northerners and stakeholders from the territorial governments and the industry.

Bill C-15 is designed to transfer the management of lands and resources in the Northwest Territories to the Government of the Northwest Territories. In addition, Bill C-15 would improve the regulatory regime in the Northwest Territories by removing barriers that hamper private investment, by improving environmental stewardship and by investing in programs that support economic growth and create opportunities for northerners.

This bill is the result of a deep desire to update existing laws and bring them into the 21st century. The last significant devolution to the Northwest Territories took place in the late 1980s, when education, health care, transportation and renewable resources were transferred to them.

Bill C-15 is split into two important and distinct parts. As I mentioned earlier, the first part amends the Northwest Territories Act, which is the territory's constitution. Other laws are amended to implement the Northwest Territories Land and Resources Devolution Agreement.

The people of the Northwest Territories have been trying for decades to get powers similar to the ones that the provinces have. The NDP supports the transfer of these powers and strongly supports the Northwest Territories in its effort to take over federal responsibilities in the north.

I would like to share what the Premier of the Northwest Territories, Robert McLeod, said when the Legislative Assembly approved the agreement:

This Assembly has a vision of a strong, prosperous and sustainable territory. Devolution is the path to that future. Responsibility for our lands and resources is the key to unlocking the economic potential that will provide opportunities to all our residents.

*Statements by Members*

I would also like to take this opportunity to warmly congratulate my colleague from the riding of the Northwest Territories for his excellent work on Bill C-15. I want to share what he had to say about the role the Premier of the Northwest Territories had in concluding the negotiations:

I think one of the great accomplishments of Premier McLeod, with the devolution file, has been to bring many of the first nations on board. Premier McLeod himself is of aboriginal descent and has a great deal of respect among first nations peoples—among all of us in the north—for his...fairness. I think that is something that has helped the devolution file tremendously.

I also want to share a quote from Robert Alexie Jr., the president of the Gwich'in Tribal Council, when the agreement was being signed by the Government of Canada and aboriginal leaders in the Northwest Territories. He said, "We don't have to fear devolution. It's a new beginning".

We completely agree, which is why the NDP strongly supports the devolution of powers to the Government of the Northwest Territories. That government is in a better position to know how its own resources should be used, and it should have the final say. That is something that all the provinces can understand.

According to the agreement, the Government of the Northwest Territories will keep 50% of the revenue from resource development on their public lands and the Government of Canada will keep the rest. In addition, the Government of the Northwest Territories will receive \$70 million a year in compensation for delivering the programs and services off-loaded by Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada.

• (1355)

The second part of Bill C-15 amends the Mackenzie Valley Resource Management Act by eliminating the regional land and water boards created through land claim agreements with the first nations. Some first nations have expressed their concerns about the amendments to the Mackenzie Valley Resource Management Act.

Here is another quote from Robert Alexie Jr., president of the Gwich'in Tribal Council, commenting on the council's opposition to the amendments to the Mackenzie Valley Resource Management Act:

We have a land-use plan. We have the land and water board. We have a claim. People know the process, and it works very well up here. It's only in the unsettled claim areas that there seems to be concern with the regulatory regimes and the speed with which they process applications, or lack of speed.

• (1400)

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. Barry Devolin):** I am sorry, but the time for government orders has now expired. The hon. member for Québec will have four minutes remaining following question period.

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## STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

[English]

### TAXATION

**Mrs. Kelly Block (Saskatoon—Rosetown—Biggar, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, while our athletes battle their opponents to win gold in Sochi, here at home our Conservative government is fighting for Canadian consumers. We are battling the leader of the NDP who

wants to raise the price of everything from gas to groceries, with a massive carbon tax.

Despite the opposition, our government has cut taxes over 160 times, saving a typical family of four nearly \$3,400 in 2014 alone. We cut the GST down to 5%, increased the amount Canadians can earn tax free, and introduced tax-free savings accounts that are now benefiting more than 9 million Canadians. The federal tax burden for consumers is now the lowest it has been in 50 years.

However, we will not stop there. Stay tuned. Today, when the world's greatest finance minister tables economic action plan 2014, there just might be more.

\* \* \*

[Translation]

### PRIVACY

**Ms. Charmaine Borg (Terrebonne—Blainville, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, today is not just budget day 2014. It is also a national day of action against inappropriate surveillance of Canadian citizens.

[English]

That is right. Today is also the day we fight back. A coalition of organizations across Canada have joined together to speak out against the illegal spying on Canadians in airports by CSEC and the government's failure to ensure the protection of the personal information of Canadians.

[Translation]

I would like to express my support for all of those who will get involved today to demand more transparency from the government with respect to Communications Security Establishment Canada and an end to its violations of privacy.

[English]

I invite all Canadians who cherish their privacy to visit [thedaywefightback.ca](http://thedaywefightback.ca) to demand that the government take our privacy seriously.

\* \* \*

### HOCKEY TOURNAMENT

**Mr. Rick Dykstra (St. Catharines, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, every year for the last 49 years a very special hockey tournament takes place. The Merritton Athletic Association in St. Catharines and the Wissahickon Skating Club in Philadelphia have taken turns hosting the tournament each year. This year is their 50th anniversary celebration.

*Statements by Members*

The tournament brings together young players between the ages of 11 and 14, as well as their families and friends. For 50 years, along with the competition, all of those who have competed have been able to learn from each other the principles of hard work, sportsmanship, and teamwork. It is a highlight of the hockey year for all involved and it has forged friendships, relationships, and the kind of memories that last a lifetime. I played my youth hockey at Merritton and this is a group of dedicated volunteers who help our kids become better people.

My good friend Congressman Pat Meehan and I want to congratulate both the Wissahickon Skating Club and the Merritton Athletic Association for 50 years of commitment to our youth. It is too bad for Pat that Merritton has had to win so many of these tournaments.

\* \* \*

**THE BUDGET**

**Hon. John McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Finance is about to achieve a unique distinction in the modern era of finance ministers. This will be his eighth budget deficit in a row. He will have added \$160 billion to Canadian debt woes. He will have added \$20,000 worth of debt to every family in Canada.

Just when Canadians find themselves with record household debt, the finance minister comes along and adds \$5,000 to the debt of every man, woman, and child in Canada and then has the gall to lecture them on their own personal finances.

It was all so unnecessary. These are all self-inflicted wounds. The Minister of Finance destroyed the revenue base he inherited from the Liberal government and has never been able to balance his budget and match his expenses to his revenues, and again he will not do it today.

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**CITIZENSHIP AND IMMIGRATION**

**Mr. Parm Gill (Brampton—Springdale, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, in Brampton-Springdale we hosted a meet and greet in our office to help welcome new citizens to our growing and vibrant community. The event was a resounding success where constituents from across our community came to share their immigration stories with one another. It was an excellent event that allowed us to meet some amazing Canadians coming from all different backgrounds, including Polish, Afghani, Mexican, and many more.

Each year, thousands of people come to our country in hopes of building a better life, to share in the values of freedom, opportunity, respect for the rule of law, and equality that help make Canada the greatest country in the world. Canada is a land of freedom and opportunity.

To hear the gratitude in the voices of new Canadian citizens from all backgrounds is truly moving. I look forward to doing this again in the near future.

● (1405)

**SERGEANT-AT-ARMS**

**Mr. Peter Stoffer (Sackville—Eastern Shore, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, in a person's lifetime one can come across a person who is an absolutely remarkable gentleman. I am speaking of none other than the great Kevin Vickers, our Sergeant-at-Arms here in the House of Commons.

Kevin Vickers has served 29 years as an RCMP officer. He is now the ninth Sergeant-at-Arms selected to the House of Commons and is now in his eighth year of service.

We want to thank his wife, Ann, and his children, Andrew and Laura, very much for sharing Mr. Vickers with us all.

Whether working with the Sikh community, the Acadian community, the aboriginal community, or the U.S. DEA in a variety of facets over his long and distinguished career, Mr. Vickers truly is one of those great gentlemen in all of Canada.

On behalf of Parliament, I want to say to our Sergeant-at-Arms, our number nine guy here, what a fabulous person and a truly tremendous gentleman he is. We are all proud to have him serve as our Sergeant-at-Arms. May God bless.

\* \* \*

**UKRAINE**

**Mr. Peter Goldring (Edmonton East, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, in December, I had the privilege of addressing an assembly of 500,000 Ukrainians who were protesting the dishonesty and regressive policies of Ukraine's president at Euromaidan in Kiev. To them, I said:

People of Ukraine, you are citizens of a great and independent country with a fantastic future! A future achieved if unfettered by external...influences.

You have many friends around the world who stand together with you. In Ottawa. In Edmonton. And here in Independence Square. We stand with you for what is right, in the face of what is wrong. We support you this day and always, to democratically and peacefully put forth your demands that your true destiny be fulfilled.

We stand with you for freedom in economic and civil trade engagement. Not just with the East. Not just with the West. But with the world as truly a nation of the world.

*Slava Ukraine!* Beware of the marauding bear!

\* \* \*

**THE BUDGET**

**Mr. Jim Hillyer (Lethbridge, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, today is budget day. The economy remains our top priority because it is the priority of the vast majority of Canadians. It is their priority because things cost money.

We all love our health care system. We love our education, our roads, our libraries, and parks. Most Canadians understand the inescapable truth that everything eventually must be paid for, that they cannot get something for nothing. So, they support our commitment to eliminate the deficit and balance the budget.

If difficult decisions are not made now, even more difficult decisions will be unavoidable in the future.

*Statements by Members*

The message is simple: keep taxes low; reduce redundant red tape; and get rid of government waste; and yes, invest in infrastructure, education and training; open up trade with other countries and create a business friendly environment; and then get out of the way, let the Canadian people continue to create jobs, opportunities and wealth, and then let them keep their own money and decide for themselves how to spend it.

\* \* \*

**TRANSPORTATION**

**Mr. Fin Donnelly (New Westminster—Coquitlam, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, transit is a concern that is frequently raised at my regular town hall meetings.

New Westminster, Coquitlam, and Port Moody commuters are frustrated by delays to transit improvements and increasing road congestion. Instead of offering solutions, provincial and federal governments are passing the buck and failing to show leadership. Instead of working collaboratively with regional mayors, the B.C. Liberals are pushing a referendum that would only cause further delays.

I call upon the federal government to play an active role in addressing the region's needs by implementing a national transit strategy and providing cities with the long-term, sustainable, predictable infrastructure funding they need.

I would like to send my best wishes to all of Canada's athletes competing in the 2014 Winter Olympic Games in Sochi. I congratulate Coquitlam's Kevin Reynolds, whose amazing performance in team figure skating led Canada to a silver medal win. Way to go Canada!

\* \* \*

• (1410)

**ORLÉANS**

**Mr. Royal Galipeau (Ottawa—Orléans, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, today is budget day. We look forward to hearing the Minister of Finance speak to us this afternoon.

*[Translation]*

Economic development in Ottawa—Orléans has been lagging behind for decades.

*[English]*

Thanks to the attentive team work begun in 2006 by the dedicated Orléans city councillors, our dynamic chamber of commerce, and their servant in this House, we are in the process of re-branding Orléans.

*[Translation]*

Thanks to an \$880 million investment from the government, the new Communications Security Establishment Canada office should be up and running by the end of the year.

*[English]*

Very soon the VENUS Cybersecurity Corporation will be setting up shop in Orléans. VENUS will serve as a business incubator for the knowledge industry.

Orléans has become the computer and telecommunications security capital, generating many jobs.

*[Translation]*

Orleans, an educated and bilingual community, is on a roll.

\* \* \*

**ALEXANDRE BILODEAU**

**Mr. Alain Giguère (Marc-Aurèle-Fortin, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to rise today to celebrate Alexandre Bilodeau's gold medal at the Sochi games. Alexandre Bilodeau is a great Olympian from Rosemère who achieved the remarkable feat of winning gold in the same event at two consecutive Olympic games. We were all glued to our sets cheering on Alexandre. We sent him all our positive energy.

His win makes the community of Rosemère, the riding of Marc-Aurèle-Fortin and the entire country extremely proud. His athletic achievements and his involvement in social causes are a reminder of what a privilege it is to be able to count on Alexandre to inspire our youth. This victory is particularly inspiring during these Hooked on School Days.

Congratulations, Alexandre. You are a double Olympic champion. You are and forever will be the king of the moguls. Well done.

\* \* \*

*[English]***WINTER OLYMPIC GAMES**

**Mr. Bruce Stanton (Simcoe North, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, earlier today we got the great news of yet another incredible achievement by our athletes in Sochi. At the debut at the winter Olympics of the women's ski slopestyle, Canada has taken the gold and bronze medals, putting Canada to the top of the medal standings for the first time in our history.

The women competing in free-style skiing this Olympics remember their comrade and hero, Sarah Burke, who died while training two years ago. She pioneered the sport, and with or without the tribute to Sarah on their helmets, it is clear they hold Sarah's memory and spirit in their hearts.

Today's gold medallist is the daughter of fellow resort operators in Ontario, a family we grew up with and admired for their drive and their dedication to family and business. Nineteen year old Dara Howell is the pride of Huntsville, Ontario. I know that Doug, Dee, and Brent, and the entire Howell family are immensely proud.

Today, I join with the member of Parliament for Parry Sound—Muskoka and all Canadians in congratulating Dara Howell, gold medallist, Sochi 2014.

\* \* \*

**COLONEL BERNARD FINESTONE**

**Mr. Marc Garneau (Westmount—Ville-Marie, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I rise to honour the life of the late Colonel Bernard (BJ) Finestone of Westmount, Quebec, who passed away in 2013.

### Oral Questions

BJ, an honorary colonel of the B.C. Dragoons, was decorated for his service as an officer and a tank squadron leader during World War II.

After the war, at home in Montreal, he was ever mindful of the challenges that maintaining a democratic way of life present. As such, he readily put his training and experiences to work wherever and whenever he saw they were needed. In Quebec and in British Columbia, he regularly met with soldiers serving in the Canadian Forces. Security was of utmost concern to BJ.

In uniform or out, he served his country, community and family with distinction.

Canadians are forever grateful for the steadfastness shown by Colonel Finestone in defence of the values of freedom. I am honoured today to pay tribute to his life of service to Canada.

\* \* \*

### THE BUDGET

**Mr. Costas Menegakis (Richmond Hill, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, yesterday we learned that the vast majority of high school students, some 81%, agree with our government's plan to reduce federal debt.

Today we are getting more support. According to the Canadian Press, there is "...broad support for budget balance as feds poised for black ink in 2015". Moreover, "A new Harris-Decima poll finds a remarkable consensus about deficit reduction...a clear majority... believe the deficit should be eliminated before any increased spending occurs".

● (1415)

[Translation]

Economic action plan 2014 will pave the way for a balanced budget in 2015, while continuing to create quality jobs, lower costs for consumers and encourage economic growth.

[English]

We are pleased to have broad support from a "remarkable consensus" of Canadians. Unfortunately, the Liberals continue to oppose our efforts to balance the budget.

This again shows the Liberal leader's poor judgment. In contrast to the strong economic leadership of the Prime Minister and the world's greatest minister of finance, the Liberal leader has no plan for the economy.

He is in way over his head.

\* \* \*

[Translation]

### DEMOCRATIC REFORM

**Mr. Pierre Dionne Labelle (Rivière-du-Nord, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, last week, the Minister of State for Democratic Reform introduced a bill tailor made to protect the Conservatives. This bill is the next front in the war against Elections Canada that the Conservatives have been waging for years before the courts.

As with every other hyper-partisan bill they introduce in the House, the Conservatives are using the same parliamentary procedures: time allocation and time constraints.

Our electoral system, which is the cornerstone of our democracy, should not be used for partisan purposes, even though that seems to be the only approach the Conservatives understand. It is not in the interest of Canadians to muzzle the Chief Electoral Officer, control the commissioner's investigative powers, impede research into voter behaviours and, above all, try to strip thousands of people of their right to vote.

By not allowing Elections Canada to communicate freely with Canadians, the Conservatives are weakening the very nature of our democracy. That is why we will not support measures that are designed to restrict voter participation. Canadian democracy deserves better than this Conservative government.

\* \* \*

[English]

### TELECOMMUNICATIONS

**Mr. Terence Young (Oakville, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, last week our government announced important improvements to the process for approving cellular tower locations. We have given Canadians a far greater say in where cellular towers may be built in their communities.

In Oakville, Bell Canada ignored local residents, placing cellular antennae in residential areas, in one case 13 metres from a house, without giving any notice to the local residents. Bell ignored homeowners, many of whom are its own customers. Our policy would force all cellular companies to conduct a robust process to inform and consult municipalities and local residents where cellular towers are proposed, including, for the first time, towers under 15 metres.

I am hoping that Bell Canada CEO George Cope and his board of directors will now realize that Canadians have a right to participate in decisions affecting their families, homes, communities, and health, and that they will move their invasive antennae in Oakville—now.

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## ORAL QUESTIONS

[English]

### DEMOCRATIC REFORM

**Hon. Thomas Mulcair (Leader of the Opposition, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, would the Prime Minister agree to amend his unfair elections act to remove the gag order against the Chief Electoral Officer, yes or no?

**Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, there is no such thing. On the contrary, the Chief Electoral Officer is required under multiple provisions of the act to speak and to make reports on various occasions.

*Oral Questions*

[Translation]

**Hon. Thomas Mulcair (Leader of the Opposition, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I am starting to think that he does not know what is in his bill. Under the Conservatives' electoral "deform", if the Chief Electoral Officer finds out about massive electoral fraud like that committed over and over by the Conservatives in the last election, he will not even have the right to inform voters about it.

How can the Prime Minister justify that?

**Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, there was no such fraud in the last election. For the next election, the fact is that there will be an independent election commissioner who will have full authority to conduct investigations.

[English]

The difficulty here is the NDP, as its spokesman conceded, decided to oppose the bill before reading it.

I obviously would encourage those members to use the weeks ahead of us to actually read things.

• (1420)

**Hon. Thomas Mulcair (Leader of the Opposition, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, let us read it.

Could the Prime Minister tell us what is proposed by the following, proposed subsection 376(3):

The commercial value of services provided to a registered party for the purpose of soliciting—by mail, telephone or other electronic means—monetary contributions is not an election expense under subsection (1), as long as the soliciting is directed only towards individuals who have made at least one monetary contribution of \$20 or more to the registered party....

Could the Prime Minister tell us what mischief is being remedied by that provision?

**Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, since we eliminated union contributions and eliminated the taxpayer subsidies to political parties, it is now incumbent upon political parties to raise their own money. Internal operations and the normal operations of raising money would obviously not be part of the expenses that one would incur in terms of communicating with the broader public.

**Hon. Thomas Mulcair (Leader of the Opposition, NDP):** Of course, Mr. Speaker, the reference to \$20 is interesting, because if someone makes a contribution of \$20, that person does not get a receipt. It does not count anywhere.

What the Conservatives are saying here is that the Conservative Party is going to be able to spend an unlimited amount of money on fundraising and say it does not count in its limit. The Conservatives are front-loading their cheating for the next election.

**Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, rules regarding fundraising expenses apply to all political parties.

The cheating that we have seen was the NDP using union money that it is not allowed to use under the act, and that will continue to be illegal.

**41ST GENERAL ELECTION**

**Hon. Thomas Mulcair (Leader of the Opposition, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, in 2006, the in-and-out scandal was orchestrated from the central committee of the Conservative Party. There were condemnations and convictions. What punishment did he impose? He stuck them in the Senate. In 2008, he was still back there waiting for his trial. In 2011, thousands of illegal robocalls were made from the central computer of the Conservative Party.

Is the Prime Minister still trying to convince Canadians he did not know anything about it?

**Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, once again, of course, that is not true. The court found—

**Some hon. members:** Oh, oh!

**The Speaker:** Order. The Right Hon. Prime Minister has the floor.

**Right Hon. Stephen Harper:** Mr. Speaker, it is completely to the contrary. I do notice the tendency of the leader of the NDP, whether it is elections or Osama bin Laden, to fall into conspiracy theory.

The reality is that the Conservative Party of Canada won the last election because we received more votes from Canadians, and because we continue to serve Canadians, we will continue to win elections.

\* \* \*

**INTERGOVERNMENTAL RELATIONS**

**Mr. Justin Trudeau (Papineau, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, last budget day a job grant was introduced that was paid for by cutting provincial job training for the most vulnerable. The provinces rejected it, there is still no agreement, and funding for vital job training organizations is in doubt.

When will this economic problem created by last year's budget be solved?

**Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, unlike the party opposite, this party has increased funding for health, post-secondary education, and the major transfers to the provinces, unlike the Liberal Party of Canada.

We have been very clear that the Canada job grant goes beyond training. The purpose is to make sure we actually create jobs. Canada has the best job-creation record in the G7 over the last several years. The Liberal Party may not view that as a national priority, but we do.

\* \* \*

**GOVERNMENT ADVERTISING**

**Mr. Justin Trudeau (Papineau, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, even though the Canada job grant is still not in place a year later, the government wasted millions in taxpayers' money advertising it during the Stanley Cup playoffs last year.

Will the government commit that it will not advertise any budget 2014 initiatives that are not yet available to Canadians, particularly during the Olympics?

*Oral Questions*

**Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, of course I am delighted to see the wide stakeholder support that the Canada job grant has received.

Mr. Speaker, I can certainly assure you that this government will ensure that Canadians remain well informed of the services available to them. If the Liberals have no policies and therefore no policies to advertise, that really is their problem.

• (1425)

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Justin Trudeau (Papineau, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, in the last federal budget, the government was awfully proud of its Canada job grant, a program that is still not up and running. Even so, the government spent vast sums of money advertising it during the Stanley Cup playoffs.

Will the Prime Minister commit to not wasting taxpayers' money on useless ads during the Olympic Games?

**Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the Canada job grant is a job creation policy. It is not just about training. It involves putting together money from the private sector and governments to create jobs for unemployed workers.

We have the best track record for job creation in the G7, and we intend to make sure that people always know about the services available to them.

\* \* \*

[*English*]

**DEMOCRATIC REFORM**

**Ms. Chris Charlton (Hamilton Mountain, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, the Chief Electoral Officer's report from the last campaign says that the proportion of electors who use their voter information cards with another authorized piece of identification—for example, a hospital bracelet—to cast their vote in seniors residences and long-term care facilities was about 73%.

Conservative changes to the act would remove this option for voter identification. Why would the government remove the voter information card and make it harder for seniors to vote?

**Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Minister of State (Democratic Reform), CPC):** Mr. Speaker, it is quite the contrary. Canadians voted for many years without using the voter information card as a form of identification. It is a rather new phenomenon and a quite unsecure one. In fact, according to Elections Canada's own information, one in six people have false information on their voter information cards, and that can be used for the purposes of voter fraud.

We are not going to allow that to happen, but what we will require is for Elections Canada to better advertise what ID is required. There are 39 different pieces of ID people can bring. We are going to make sure that people know what they are.

**Ms. Chris Charlton (Hamilton Mountain, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, the question was about seniors voting. Is the minister really suggesting that the very people who fought for our right to vote are now defrauding the system?

In the same report, the Chief Electoral Officer said 62% of students use their voter information cards to cast their ballots. When

young people vote, they form habits that make them lifelong voters, but for students at school, proving their residency can often be a challenge.

Why is the government making it harder for young people to cast their votes?

**Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Minister of State (Democratic Reform), CPC):** Mr. Speaker, once again it is quite the contrary. I have a list in my hands of the eligible ID that people can use, and it does include the student ID card. There are 38 other forms of identification that Elections Canada will be required under law to inform students of.

Furthermore, we will open up a new day of voting on which young people can vote. Right now, half of youth are not even aware that they can vote before election day. The law will be changed so that Elections Canada will clearly advertise those voting opportunities so that we can increase the turnout of our young people.

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Ève Péclet (La Pointe-de-l'Île, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, under this bill, the Chief Electoral Officer can speak publicly only about certain topics that must be pre-approved by the Conservatives. One thing he will not be allowed to talk about is the state of our election system. That makes absolutely no sense.

Why do the Conservatives want to legislate to limit the freedom of expression of an officer of Parliament?

**Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Minister of State (Democratic Reform), CPC):** Mr. Speaker, this is the problem that arises when the NDP members take a stance on a bill that they have never read.

Not only will the Chief Electoral Officer have the right to speak, but he will be required to do so. Under sections 533, 534 and 535, he is required to report to Parliament. These reports are automatically public. The Chief Electoral Officer will speak loudly and clearly to parliamentarians and all Canadians.

**Ms. Ève Péclet (La Pointe-de-l'Île, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, yesterday the minister said on CBC that he was willing to compromise. Perhaps he is beginning to realize his mistakes.

Under this bill, from now on, the Commissioner of Canada Elections will be under the authority of the Minister of Justice. If the bill passes in its present form, the commissioner will have to inform the Minister of Justice of any investigations under way, even if the commissioner is investigating the minister's own party.

Do the Conservatives really believe that this chain of command is appropriate?

*Oral Questions*

• (1430)

[English]

**Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Minister of State (Democratic Reform), CPC):** Mr. Speaker, all that member has to do to know that she is factually wrong is read section 2 of the Director of Public Prosecutions Act, which explicitly forbids the Attorney General/Justice Minister from having any involvement in prosecutions related to the Canada Elections Act. Furthermore, the Director of Public Prosecutions is selected by an independent committee that includes representatives of every political party, two senior public servants, and a member of the law society, and that director can only be removed by a vote of the House of Commons. Those are multiple layers of independence.

[Translation]

**Ms. Alexandrine Latendresse (Louis-Saint-Laurent, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, unfortunately that is not all that is wrong with the Elections Act reform. In fact, 73% of the people who live in long-term care facilities used their voter cards as identification in the last election, and 62% of students did the same thing. However, the Minister of State for Democratic Reform would like to prevent people from using their voter cards to vote.

Why are the Conservatives trying to suppress the right to vote of sick people and students?

**Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Minister of State (Democratic Reform), CPC):** Mr. Speaker, a student card is an acceptable form of identification according to Elections Canada. However, one out of six voter information cards contains mistakes. That is too many.

An episode of the television program *Infoman* showed two people voting twice with these cards. The episode was called “Elections Canada’s two for one”. We will not allow this kind of electoral fraud to continue. We will protect our electoral system.

**Ms. Alexandrine Latendresse (Louis-Saint-Laurent, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, it would be nice if the minister had his facts straight. A student can vote only if the student card shows an address. Not all student cards show an address. I know that for a fact.

There is another problem with the new bill. Limiting the authority of the Chief Electoral Officer to communicate information to the public ensures that any research and surveys conducted to shed light on voter behaviour will be useless. This information can no longer be released. However, scientific data plays a truly important role in understanding voter behaviour and changing strategies to promote participation.

Can the Conservatives explain why they are opposed to research and surveys that shed light on voter behaviour?

[English]

**Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Minister of State (Democratic Reform), CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the member’s interpretation of the changes that would come to section 18 of the Canada Elections Act is in fact false. The purpose of those changes is to focus Elections Canada’s purchased advertising on the basics of voting: where, when, and what ID to bring.

Why is that important? It is because one-quarter of young people, according to Elections Canada, fail to vote because they are not aware of how, where, or when to do so. Half of the young people are

not even aware that they can vote before elections day. They need that information to exercise their democratic right. We will make sure they get it.

[Translation]

**Ms. Alexandrine Latendresse (Louis-Saint-Laurent, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, the minister can try to hoodwink us all he likes, but it was the Chief Electoral Officer himself who explained the problem. He said: “These reports will no longer be available. In fact, not only not available. I don’t think it will be done at all”.

Why do the Conservatives believe that Elections Canada should not do scientific research and share its findings on the conduct of elections?

**Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Minister of State (Democratic Reform), CPC):** Mr. Speaker, according to sections 533, 534 and 535 of the Canada Elections Act, the Chief Electoral Officer will not only be authorized to continue to communicate with Canadians, he will be required to do so.

The changes we are making to section 18 would focus Elections Canada’s ads on the facts that are important to Canadians: where to vote, how to vote, what ID to bring and what special tools are available to help Canadians with disabilities vote.

• (1435)

[English]

**Mr. Craig Scott (Toronto—Danforth, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, the Neufeld report to Elections Canada outlined procedural problems that the Elections Act calls “irregularities”. These are due to staff making mistakes on election day, like a small mistake in filling out a form when a voter is being vouched for. However, Neufeld never even came close to saying these irregularities constituted, led to, or represented a serious risk of fraud.

Why is the minister constantly misrepresenting these statistics?

**Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Minister of State (Democratic Reform), CPC):** Mr. Speaker, this is what Neufeld actually said:

Serious errors, of a type courts consider “irregularities” that can contribute to an election being overturned, were found to occur in 12 percent of all Election Day cases involving voter registration, and 42 percent of cases involving identity vouching.

I have said before that in four ridings that were audited by the Neufeld commission, it found a 25% error rate, but when it audited the whole country, that rate actually rose to 42%, an astounding and very troubling number.

**Mr. Craig Scott (Toronto—Danforth, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, as justices Rothstein and Moldaver of the Supreme Court said in the contested election decision on Etobicoke Centre, “The procedural safeguards in the Act are important; however, they should not be treated as ends in themselves”.

*Oral Questions*

As I think the minister knows, the right to vote is protected by the Charter of Rights, the only limits being citizenship and where a voter lives. Given these facts, why does the minister think this legislation, particularly removing vouching, is actually constitutional?

**Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Minister of State (Democratic Reform), CPC):** Mr. Speaker, what Mr. Neufeld actually said in his report, when he defined irregularities, was that those irregularities were “serious errors”—his words, not mine. He said, “An ‘irregularity’ is a failure by an election officer to administer safeguards demonstrating that a voter is entitled to receive a ballot”.

These irregularities occurred in over 50,000 cases across the entire country. Furthermore, the report finds they cannot be solved by minor administrative changes. In fact, we need big changes and that is what I propose in the fair elections act.

\* \* \*

**THE ECONOMY**

**Ms. Chrystia Freeland (Toronto Centre, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, today the average Canadian owes an all-time high of \$1.64 for every dollar she or he earns. Middle-class Canadians are borrowing more because they are earning less. We have seen this story before. As in the United States before the financial crisis, ballooning personal debt is masking our economy's underlying weakness.

Why has the government built our economy on this unstable mountain of personal debt, and what is it doing to move us to a more sustainable footing?

**Mr. Andrew Saxton (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, we clearly do not want Canadians to be overextended. We have cautioned Canadians repeatedly that interest rates are at an all-time low and will inevitably increase. Our priority is ensuring that Canadians can make informed financial decisions, unlike the NDP and the Liberals, who have voted against every single piece of consumer protection legislation our government has introduced.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Emmanuel Dubourg (Bourassa, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, the dramatic increase in Canadian household debt is hiding the truth about the Canadian economy.

Under this government, the average rate of public debt has increased by \$20,000 per family. Imagine: right now, for each dollar a Canadian worker makes, he or she owes \$1.64. This cannot continue.

What does the government intend to do to address this issue?

[*English*]

**Mr. Andrew Saxton (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, we have taken concrete action to help Canadians better manage their money.

We introduced credit card reforms to ensure that Canadians have access to important information. We strengthened mortgage rules to protect Canadians buying a home. We cut taxes and created the tax free savings account, the most successful savings account in Canadian history. We created a financial literacy leader to oversee our progress.

Unlike the Liberals, who voted against every consumer protection law we introduced, we are standing up for consumers.

[*Translation*]

**Hon. Dominic LeBlanc (Beauséjour, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, the Conservatives' economic programs offer false promises and false hope to Canadians. The people of New Brunswick are all too familiar with the Conservatives' lack of transparency and how hurtful it is. While they have been talking about infrastructure for eight long years, highway 11 still has just two lanes; the Richibucto arena has yet to be built; and Sackville is still waiting on funding to revitalize its downtown core. Why are the Conservatives bent on punishing New Brunswickers and their municipal officials?

● (1440)

[*English*]

**Mr. Andrew Saxton (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, in less than two hours, Canada's Minister of Finance, the best Minister of Finance in the world, will present economic action plan 2014.

Our Conservative government is focused on what matters most to Canadians, helping create jobs and supporting economic growth. That is why economic action plan 2014 will help grow Canada's economy and create jobs, while keeping taxes low and returning to balanced budgets.

I encourage the member opposite to be patient. He will have all the answers he is looking for shortly, after not even one more sleep.

\* \* \*

**INTERNATIONAL TRADE**

**Mr. Don Davies (Vancouver Kingsway, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, under the government, Canada's export performance has been in long-term decline and it continues to suffer.

December figures reveal an even worse trade deficit than expected, now \$1.7 billion, enough to knock a full point off our GDP in the fourth quarter, and we have just passed two years of monthly merchandise trade deficits.

Can the minister explain why his trade policies are failing to reverse these troubling numbers?

**Hon. Ed Fast (Minister of International Trade, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, nothing could be further from the truth. We are talking about cherry-picking statistics.

In fact, this past year, Canada's exports went up by 3.2%, almost \$15 billion, and our trade deficit dropped by almost \$3 billion. What is more, our government's low-tax pro-trade plan has created somewhere in the order of 1.1 million new jobs for Canadians.

That is a job creation record we are very proud of. We will not apologize for that.

*Oral Questions*

**Mr. Don Davies (Vancouver Kingsway, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, the minister should apologize for a \$62-billion current account deficit in this country.

According to the Bank of Canada, poor export performance is a major driver of our slow economic growth, and this means Conservative policies are costing us good, middle-class jobs.

Canadians want a trade policy that gets value-added exports moving again; so when will the minister admit what years of weak export growth have made obvious? His ideological trade strategy is simply not working.

**Hon. Ed Fast (Minister of International Trade, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, it is pretty rich for the NDP to talk about trade.

This is the party that has opposed virtually every trade agreement this government has ever signed. Let me articulate what those are: Chile, Peru, Honduras, Colombia, Liechtenstein, the United States, Mexico.

New Democrats are fundamentally opposed to trade. They do not like trade. They do not understand trade. They have absolutely no credibility on trade.

\* \* \*

[*Translation*]

**INTERGOVERNMENTAL RELATIONS**

**Mrs. Sadia Groguhé (Saint-Lambert, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, on another matter, not only did the Conservatives create the labour market agreements fiasco, but they also decided to open a new front in their battle with the provinces, this time on job training. We heard this morning that the minister wants to review the labour market development agreements. Is the minister going to learn from his mistakes, and to consult and co-operate with the provinces, so that workers can receive training and boost our economy?

[*English*]

**Hon. Candice Bergen (Minister of State (Social Development), CPC):** Mr. Speaker, Canadians expect their government to address issues such as skills training and labour market development. That is why we look forward to having open and productive discussions with our counterparts at the end of February. That is also why we have invested in skills training, whether it be our youth employment strategy, whether it be investments in apprenticeship grants, or whether it be our opportunities fund to help persons with disabilities get into the workforce.

We are helping people get back to work, and we are working together with the provinces to get that done.

• (1445)

[*Translation*]

**Mrs. Sadia Groguhé (Saint-Lambert, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, the facts speak for themselves. The Canada job grant has provoked another useless quarrel between the federal government and the provinces that is still to be settled.

The negotiations to review labour market development agreements have at least been mentioned in an introductory letter. However, there is no guarantee that the Conservatives will co-operate in working out the final agreement.

Will the Conservatives finally learn from their mistakes in labour market agreements?

[*English*]

**Hon. Candice Bergen (Minister of State (Social Development), CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the fact is that the opposition has no plans for skills development, except for raising taxes on everyday Canadians, and it has no idea what it will do, except spend billions of dollars on all kinds of programs and projects that result in nothing.

What we are doing with things like the Canada job grant is involving employers and involving the private sector so that we can train people for jobs that exist and create new jobs.

\* \* \*

**CONSUMER PROTECTION**

**Mr. Lawrence Toet (Elmwood—Transcona, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, while Canadian athletes battle their opponents in Sochi, here at home our Conservative government is fighting to protect Canadian consumers. We are battling the leader of the NDP, who wants to raise the price of everything, from gas to groceries, with higher taxes.

The people of Elmwood—Transcona are fed up with the NDP tax hike agenda. They are also fed up with cross-border price discrimination. Can the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance update the House on how our government is putting consumers first?

**Mr. Andrew Saxton (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague from Elmwood—Transcona for that excellent question.

Unlike the opposition, which voted against our consumer protection regulations, we are committed to putting consumers first. Our government has cut taxes over 160 times, saving a typical family of four nearly \$3,400 in 2014 alone, but we did not stop there. We have helped to reduce wireless rates by almost 20% since 2008, and we better protected Canadians using prepaid credit cards.

Stay tuned. Today, when the world's best Minister of Finance tables economic action plan 2014, there will be more to come.

\* \* \*

[*Translation*]

**RAIL TRANSPORTATION**

**Mr. Philip Toone (Gaspésie—Îles-de-la-Madeleine, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, today VIA Rail announced on Radio-Canada that it will stop providing service to Gaspé.

I would like the Minister of Transport to tell us if that is true.

*Oral Questions*

If it is, can the minister tell us about her plan to ensure that rail service remains available to all Canadians? Transportation is crucial to rural economies, so what does this mean for people living in remote regions?

[English]

**Hon. Lisa Raitt (Minister of Transport, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, VIA Rail is an independent crown corporation. They make decisions based upon their operating parameters. Indeed, they do publish and they do indicate what their schedules are. I encourage the member to talk to VIA Rail regarding the issue, but as I stated before, VIA Rail is independent from us.

[Translation]

**Mr. Yvon Godin (Acadie—Bathurst, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, a Miramichi paper reported that my Conservative colleague is secretly working with the Minister of Transport to try to save rail service.

She needs to start making some noise and stop watching the train leave the station. For the past three weeks, we have been on our own in the fight to save service in the Maritimes.

Now that she has realized that her own party wants to tear up the tracks, will she and her Conservative colleagues work with us to keep VIA Rail service in the Maritimes, or will they just let the train go from Quebec City to Vancouver, and never mind the Atlantic provinces?

[English]

**Hon. Lisa Raitt (Minister of Transport, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, it is very helpful to have actual facts on the floor here as opposed to the fearmongering the opposition is taking part in. The fact is this: CN Rail has entered into a discontinuance process according to the Canadian Transportation Agency. They are in that process right now. No decisions have been taken regarding this part of the rail, and indeed, no decisions have been taken by VIA Rail on this part of the rail.

The member would serve his constituents better by telling them the truth.

\* \* \*

[Translation]

**CANADA POST**

**Mrs. Djaouida Sellah (Saint-Bruno—Saint-Hubert, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, yesterday my colleague asked the Minister of Transport why the government did not act on the suggestions made in a secret report that provided possible solutions to save Canada Post. Every time, however, the minister replied that she supports the five-point plan proposed by the head of Canada Post.

Let us not forget that this plan means the loss of 8,000 jobs, a huge increase in postal rates and the loss of home mail delivery.

Why was that report kept secret?

• (1450)

[English]

**Hon. Lisa Raitt (Minister of Transport, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, if Canada Post continued on the path it was on prior to its five-point plan, it would have lost \$1 billion by 2020. That is the bill the taxpayers of Canada would have to pay. While it is difficult to hear

that 8,000 positions will be lost, the reality is that these will be lost through attrition. These are jobs that would not be there necessarily, as a result of people retiring or leaving the service.

[Translation]

**Mr. Jean-François Larose (Repentigny, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, the problem is that when they make proposals to ensure Canada Post's long-term viability, the Conservatives censure 86% of a report that proposed solutions.

We in the NDP are prepared to support any proposal that could ensure Canada Post's survival, while saving jobs and maintaining the integrity of service to Canadians.

Why censure this report? What rescue plan did this government dismiss?

[English]

**Hon. Lisa Raitt (Minister of Transport, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, as I indicated yesterday, Canada Post has been looking at the situation and determining its best path forward. They have a five-point plan. It is their plan. It is a plan supported by the Conference Board of Canada's report as well, and it is actually supported by facts, the fact being that one billion fewer pieces of mail are being utilized and put in the system than there were in 2006. Canada Post is acting to get ahead of the problem. They are part of the solution, and we support their plan.

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**VETERANS AFFAIRS**

**Ms. Judy Foote (Random—Burin—St. George's, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, the government closed nine regional Veterans Affairs offices that offered front-line services to save \$4 million. The same government spent \$30 million to commemorate the War of 1812. That could have kept these offices open for a further seven years to help today's veterans.

Canadians witnessed the disrespect the Minister of Veterans Affairs has for our veterans when he kept them waiting an hour for a meeting and then lectured them. Can we expect the same kind of contempt for veterans and misplaced priorities in this budget, or will the government do the right thing and reopen these regional offices?

**Hon. Julian Fantino (Minister of Veterans Affairs, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, we have demonstrated over many years the regard we have for our veterans in the support we have shown them. The Veterans Affairs budget has increased by 25%. It is 25% larger today than it was eight years ago. Since last year, we have eliminated millions of transactions between government and Canadian veterans. We are continuing to work on behalf of veterans and their families, with or without that party's assistance.

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**DEMOCRATIC REFORM**

**Mr. Kevin Lamoureux (Winnipeg North, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister needs to take responsibility for his party. Remember the Conservative in-and-out scandal. What about robo-calls? What about the overspending and cheating?

*Oral Questions*

If the government wants to be serious about election reform, I would ask the Prime Minister to do two things when it comes to the committee and dealing with the election reform act: number one, do not limit debate in committee; and number two, allow the committee to go into communities across Canada. Will the Prime Minister make that commitment today?

**Hon. Pierre Poilievre (Minister of State (Democratic Reform), CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the committee will do plenty of study and hear from plenty of witnesses from all quarters of Canada, and they will discuss the fair elections act.

The fair elections act will put Canadians in charge of their democracy by putting special interests on the sidelines and rule-breakers out of business. It will make it easier to vote and harder to break the law. It will crack down on loopholes designed to allow loans for the purposes of illegal donations. It will give law enforcement a watchdog—sharper teeth, a longer reach, and a freer hand. Who could be against that?

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**CITIZENSHIP AND IMMIGRATION**

**Ms. Rathika Sitsabaiesan (Scarborough—Rouge River, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, Rajini Subramaniam, a young mother from the GTA, was deported recently while waiting to file a humanitarian and compassionate application. She was removed from the country, separating her from her two small children, ages four and seven. They are now left in the care of her husband, who has had to quit one of his jobs to be able to take care of the children alone.

Why are the Conservatives continuing to defend reckless policies that are separating families?

• (1455)

**Hon. Chris Alexander (Minister of Citizenship and Immigration, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, as the member well knows, decisions with respect to refugee determination are made by a highly trained and very independent board. There is recourse under appeal to one level within the Immigration and Refugee Board and then to the Federal Court, where necessary.

We cannot comment on specific cases, but we can confirm to the House what Canadians already know, which is that the reform of our asylum system has been a tremendous success, with an 87% reduction in the number of claims from safe countries. No longer do we have the United States and three members of the European Union among our top 10 source countries.

[Translation]

**Ms. Isabelle Morin (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, there are other tragic deportation stories.

For instance, Ivonne Hernandez fled violence against her in Mexico and came to Canada as a refugee. Once here, she was once again a victim of domestic violence.

As a result, she went to a shelter for battered women in distress, and she lost custody of her son. Her refugee claim has been rejected, and she is now at risk of being deported, leaving her 14-month-old son in Canada. It is really sad.

What is the minister doing to ensure that Ms. Hernandez can stay with her son?

**Hon. Steven Blaney (Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, every day, officials from the Canada Border Services Agency make major decisions to ensure the safety of our borders. They do so with great respect for people's dignity.

When individuals enter Canada illegally, they have a number of recourse options. In this case, although I cannot comment any further, the court has ruled, as we know.

\* \* \*

[English]

**THE ECONOMY**

**Mr. Joe Preston (Elgin—Middlesex—London, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, yesterday we learned that the vast majority of high school students, 81%, agree with our government's plan to reduce the federal debt. We know that the Liberal leader has a lot to learn from these students. Despite a leader who has no plan for the economy, the Liberal Party continues to criticize our government's efforts to balance the budget.

Can the parliamentary secretary for finance please tell the House what Canadians are saying about our efforts to balance the budget?

**Mr. Andrew Saxton (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague from Elgin—Middlesex—London for that excellent question. I am pleased to report great news. According to the Canadian Press, there is "...broad support for budget balance as feds poised for black ink in 2015".

A new Harris-Decima poll finds a remarkable consensus about deficit reduction...

...a clear majority...believe the deficit should be eliminated before any increased spending occurs....

Today's great news is about to get even better. The world's greatest Minister of Finance will table economic action plan 2014 shortly, which will pave the way to a balanced budget in 2015.

\* \* \*

**THE ENVIRONMENT**

**Mr. Scott Simms (Bonavista—Gander—Grand Falls—Windor, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, the *Manolis L*, the sunken boat off the northeast coast of Newfoundland, has been leaking oil for over a year now. The Coast Guard is doing its best to patch it up. However, that is not enough. We need a long-term solution. The Coast Guard just said, "Sorry, there is no long-term solution".

However, last spring, the former minister of the environment stood in the House and talked about a long-term solution. From the current Minister of the Environment there has been absolutely nothing. Can she rise in the House and offer a long-term solution for a major potential disaster in Newfoundland and Labrador?

**Hon. Gail Shea (Minister of Fisheries and Oceans, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, we are committed to protecting our oceans from oil spills. We have made this clear through our efforts to establish a world-class tanker safety system.

*Oral Questions*

The Coast Guard completed installing new seals on the *Manolis L* in January, along with new monitoring equipment. A complete survey of the hull was conducted, and no further leakage was detected. The Coast Guard is monitoring this situation closely and will take any necessary steps to protect the environment.

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**PUBLIC WORKS AND GOVERNMENT SERVICES**

**Mr. Pat Martin (Winnipeg Centre, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, with all the talk of high finances today, the Minister of Public Works and Government Services wants to balance the books by purging all public buildings of petunias and potted plants. So far, the deforestation project is going great. She just sold 650 plants from Place du Portage for \$11.11, although I presume that was rounded down to \$11.10.

We know that government procurement is not a strong point, but we did not really realize how bad it is at divesting itself of public assets. Can the minister for defoliating public places please explain her business plan, because there is a—

**Some hon. members:** Oh, oh!

**The Speaker:** Order, please. I have asked members in the past to refer to each other by their proper titles or riding names.

I do not know if the minister wants to answer.

The hon. member for Etobicoke Centre.

\* \* \*

● (1500)

**THE ECONOMY**

**Mr. Ted Opitz (Etobicoke Centre, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, my constituents in Etobicoke Centre know that lower taxes makes Canada's economy stronger and creates quality, high-paying jobs.

That is why, since 2006, our government has lowered the average small business tax bill by \$28,000, about 30%.

What I would like to know is how we compare with the rest of the world. Would the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance please tell this House how Canada's business environment ranks on the international stage?

**Mr. Andrew Saxton (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague from Etobicoke Centre for that excellent question.

Canada is weathering the global economic storm better than most other countries, with the help of our low-tax plan. Despite the opposition who voted against every one of our job-creating tax cuts, Canada has the lowest overall tax rate on new business investment in the G7.

I am pleased to tell the House that Bloomberg has also ranked Canada as the second best place in the world to do business. Today we will table a plan that will continue to make us the envy of the world. Just like our hard-working athletes, with economic action plan 2014, we are going for the gold.

**FOREIGN INVESTMENT**

**Mr. Dennis Bevington (Western Arctic, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, despite the Prime Minister's rhetoric on Arctic sovereignty, the Conservative government has done little to protect Canada's northern resources from foreign interests.

The largest offshore exploration leaseholder in the Beaufort Sea is a small two-person British company called Franklin Petroleum. Under the current rules, these leases could be transferred to anyone, to any country, at any time, without the involvement of Canada in approving the transfer.

Why has the Prime Minister not closed this loophole?

**Hon. Joe Oliver (Minister of Natural Resources, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, we rely on our regulatory authorities to determine what projects should go ahead.

Projects only go ahead if they are safe for Canadians and safe for the environment. The party opposite should stop making decisions before it has independent scientific advice.

\* \* \*

[Translation]

**INTERGOVERNMENTAL RELATIONS**

**Mr. Jean-François Fortin (Haute-Gaspésie—La Mitis—Matane—Matapédia, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, it is no secret that the federal government wanted to impose a new job training program on Quebec that was rejected by all those involved at the provincial level. Now the minister is adding insult to injury. He wants to change the parameters of another agreement, the labour market development agreement. In an open letter, Quebec's employment minister publicly reminded the federal minister that she was still waiting for him to return her call. Now we know what happened yesterday. The federal minister dialled the wrong number. Ms. Maltais is the employment minister, not Ms. De Courcy.

Can the minister's assistant take down Ms. Maltais' phone number, 418-643-4810, and pass on the message?

[English]

**Hon. Candice Bergen (Minister of State (Social Development), CPC):** Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Employment and Social Development did indicate yesterday that he has had good discussions with his Quebec counterpoint, Minister Maltais, about involving employers in skills training. He noted the success of some of Quebec's labour market programs.

We look forward to continuing discussions with Quebec on how to deliver the Canada job grant, as well as discussions around labour productivity and development in Canada.

*Government Orders***GOVERNMENT ORDERS**

[Translation]

**NORTHWEST TERRITORIES DEVOLUTION ACT**

The House resumed consideration of Bill C-15, An Act to replace the Northwest Territories Act to implement certain provisions of the Northwest Territories Lands and Resources Devolution Agreement and to repeal or make amendments to the Territorial Lands Act, the Northwest Territories Waters Act, the Mackenzie Valley Resource Management Act, other Acts and certain orders and regulations, as reported (with amendment) from the committee, and of Motions Nos. 4 and 5.

**The Speaker:** The member for Québec has four minutes remaining for her speech.

**Ms. Annick Papillon (Québec, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I will pick up where I left off before question period in my speech on Bill C-15.

The NDP will continue to look at the concerns that have been raised about the changes to the Mackenzie Valley Resource Management Act. That is why we proposed amendments in committee. What the NDP wants most is to ensure that Bill C-15 meets the expectations of northerners, so we will continue to work very hard for them. The NDP firmly believes in a nation to nation dialogue, carried out with the utmost respect.

When people are consulted, they play an important role in the development of their land and resources. A project is more likely to be successful when the community is clearly informed of the steps of the project and its direct and indirect consequences, and when it is able to help improve the project. We have observed that here in Canada, in the context of citizen initiatives, for example. We have also observed it abroad, when a humanitarian project can only be successful over the long term if the local population has given its support to the project and has had its say.

I say that when this Conservative government does as it pleases, when it imposes its vision on municipalities, provinces, territories and northern residents, and when it does no public consultation or impact studies before imposing its reforms, it is completely worn out. It is tired after nine years in power. It is time to move on to other things. That is bad power. The government has to be replaced. People can count on the NDP to replace this government in 2015.

We will do it with the people, with the municipalities, with the provinces, with the territories, with people from the north, the south, the east and the west, people from across the country, from sea to sea.

One thing is for sure: a government that turns its back on a problem instead of facing it is clearly unable to face it. I say that this government is not listening to the people; it is dismissing them in the context of Bill C-15. I say enough is enough.

I think a lot of people will say that enough is enough in 2015 and that it is time to bring Canada into the 21st century. Even though this is the second-largest country in the world, it is not too big.

We can do it with people; we can do it by working with them.

I encourage all Canadians to tell themselves that they deserve better than the rotten Conservative government they have now.

● (1505)

[English]

**Mr. Mark Strahl (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, I will not attempt to match the entertainment value of that speech with my question.

The Northwest Territories chamber of mines and the Government of Northwest Territories released their “Northwest Territories Mineral Development Strategy”, in which they recognize the importance of regulatory improvement. They said:

By creating a strong regulatory framework that clearly outlines consultation requirements, processes and timing, companies will have increased clarity regarding regulatory process expectations. [...]

The GNWT needs to support the timely completion and lead the effective implementation of Canada's Regulatory Reform Action Plan.

I know the NDP opposes responsible resource development. I know that they oppose everything this government proposes by rote, but would she agree that it could perhaps support the Government of Northwest Territories to put forward a plan for regulatory improvement, or does she oppose that consensus government as well?

[Translation]

**Ms. Annick Papillon:** Mr. Speaker, I see that my colleague opposite did not listen to the beginning of my speech because I spoke about economic development a great deal.

Yes, the NDP is in favour of economic development, but not without considering the resulting social, economic and environmental obligations. That can be done by consulting the people. By modernizing the existing rules, we can develop this sector in Canada's north, in partnership, of course, with private companies that can invest in it. That is the point we have reached and it is why we believe that it is time to modernize. That is our goal for Bill C-15.

● (1510)

**Mr. Dany Morin (Chicoutimi—Le Fjord, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for her fantastic speech.

I think that this will be a lot more interesting than the Minister of Finance's budget presentation later this afternoon. I was not fortunate enough to be present yesterday for the first part of my colleague's speech, but I found the second part to be extraordinary.

Can she go over the highlights I missed in the first part of her speech, the points that my hon. colleagues in the House—especially those opposite—need to hear?

**Ms. Annick Papillon:** Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the hon. member for his speech.

There are three key messages that the House should take note of in the NDP's request. I am pleased to see that the members opposite are paying closer attention now.

*Government Orders*

For decades, the people living in the Northwest Territories have been trying to get powers similar to those of the provinces. The NDP agrees with the transfer of powers and supports the Northwest Territories in its efforts to take over certain federal responsibilities in the north.

The Northwest Territories is in the best position—as every province and provincial or municipal authority can appreciate—to know how its resources should be used. The Northwest Territories should have the final say. We are asking the government to support that.

We will ensure that Bill C-15 meets the expectations of northerners and, in committee, we will look at some of the concerns raised about the Conservatives' plan to have the bill include changes to the Mackenzie Valley Resource Management Act.

That is the NDP's message: yes to economic development, but jointly with northerners. Otherwise, it will not work.

**Mr. Jean Rousseau (Compton—Stanstead, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I congratulate my colleague, who is always so passionate and eloquent.

She spoke about collaborating with and listening to first nations people and residents of the Northwest Territories and the desire to expand resource development.

There are many fine examples across Canada. However, there is still a little bit of work to be done in the Northwest Territories. We would like the Conservative Party to be eloquent and collaborative with respect to what remains to be done.

It is important to work with a territory's people because that allows them to adequately feed and house themselves. First nations across Canada are demanding that these basic needs be met. In Bill C-15, there is just a little more work to be done as far as the Northwest Territories are concerned.

**Ms. Annick Papillon:** Mr. Speaker, I would first of all like to thank my colleague.

Nation to nation dialogue demonstrates respect. You cannot say that you agree with a nation if you do not respect that nation. Respect is a key word. It is something that other nations can understand, and not just first nations. We want this Conservative government to fully recognize what it means to be a nation.

[*English*]

**Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, it is a real honour, as always, to rise in the House and represent the people of Timmins—James Bay and speak again to Bill C-15 on the devolution of powers in the Northwest Territories.

At the outset, certainly the New Democrats support the principle of devolution, and I will speak a bit about the importance of devolution in a country as large and diversified as ours. However, we are concerned about clauses 136 and 137 of the bill, which would fold the regional municipal planning boards into one. We believe those changes would not be in the spirit of the negotiations with the people of the Northwest Territories and first nations. This is an outstanding problem that needs to be addressed. We can do good devolution, but we need to ensure that the voices of the people are properly heard.

My own region of Timmins—James Bay is larger than the United Kingdom, but there are many isolated fly-in communities. There are attempts under way to develop hydro resources and copper and diamonds, yet we also have communities that live in intense poverty, a veritable fourth world. Some of my communities are called “Haiti at -40°C”.

When we go into these communities, we see that the federal government has done a very poor job in fulfilling its fiduciary responsibilities and in basic credible management to ensure that development occurs. If we were to talk to people in my region from the mining sector and first nations, we would hear one common voice asking, “Where is the government? Why is the government not doing its job at the table?”

We are trying to get development off the ground in a community that has no doctors, no grade school, and 20 people living in shacks. If a mining company is attempting resource development where people will be hired, we have people who have not been able to graduate. We need the federal government at the table doing its job. We also need the province doing its job. This is why I think that with the issue of devolution in the Northwest Territories, we have to look at it through the lens of how to ensure that development is equitable across the vast terrain of our country where we have smaller populations.

I will give a few examples of the failure of vision in how things have been handled.

The Ring of Fire is a massive mineral resource development project in the northwest of my riding that could impact development for generations to come. Members will remember when the member for Parry Sound—Muskoka was appointed. He was going to be the special point person and the Conservative government was going to make the Ring of Fire happen. The Conservatives were going to be the champions of the development of the Ring of Fire. Well, they all ran away from that one; we do not hear a peep out of them. We also saw how the provincial Liberal government completely botched it.

When we go into the communities, there is frustration because of the extremely high level of poverty. If we asked people in those regions about mining, they would say they understand that mining is going to happen, but it has to be done right with environmental protections and proper consultation.

Consultation is not just a matter of a fiat from Ottawa telling all the little people how they are going to live; it is about respecting the land and the traditions. Without the federal government or the province at the table, this multi-billion-dollar project is sitting on idle.

*Government Orders*

In my region, simple projects could have been moved ahead through devolution of authority. For example, Attawapiskat has been without a grade school for years. Children are being educated on a toxic brownfield, but the current government walked away at the eleventh hour on a long-term plan to build a school. The then minister of Indian Affairs, Chuck Strahl, said at the time that building schools for children was not a priority. The community was ready to build that school. This was a big project, and the community had financing through a bank. This was innovative. This was grassroots. They had bank financing and all they needed was the federal government to sign a tuition agreement. We could have had a new way of getting schools off the ground, but we had a belligerent government and a closed-minded bureaucracy, and that school was not built. This led to the whole push for Shannen's dream, which ended up at the United Nations with Canada being shamed on the international stage about its basic legal obligation to build schools for children.

● (1515)

As for the outcome of the Attawapiskat housing crisis, in 2011 we had a plan to build 30 new rent-to-own houses in the community. They were not asking for handouts from the government. This was a community that had gone to the CMHC. They were ready to move forward. All they needed was a ministerial guarantee to sign off. The minister refused to sign and those 30 houses were not built.

However, it was not just the current government that dropped the ball, it was also the provincial government. In communities on the James Bay coast, we do not even have the land base to expand the community, despite the fact we have growing populations, because the province sits and claims the land. There is no one up in those regions on the James Bay except the Mushkego Cree, yet Queen's Park has the temerity, the gall, to say it is all provincial land, that they need its sign-off. Why is it not signing off? We will never see the province show up at the table when these simple things need to be done, so our communities are stuck in a catch-22 between a belligerent and incompetent federal government and a provincial government that believes its citizens of the James Bay region, because they are Cree, are somehow not citizens of Ontario. As a result, simple projects do not move forward.

We have the same problem with policing, just as they do in the far, far north, with our Nishnawbe-Aski police service that represents all the peoples of Treaty 9. I was at the funeral of the two young men who burned to death in the police detachment in Kashechewan in 2006. To call it a police detachment is incorrect; it was a shack out of which the police were delivering services. Two young men were trapped in there and burned to death, horrifically. Out of that inquest, light was finally shone on the substandard conditions that police face in these regions, with high levels of PTSD and young police officers killing themselves. There is no support from the federal or provincial governments.

One the issues we had was the need to ensure that we just had basic, proper police units. In Kashechewan the government did not want to put in fire sprinklers because it would cost money. It would be illegal anywhere else in the province of Ontario to have a public building without sprinklers, but they got away with that on a reserve because the feds were not going to worry about it and the province

was not going to spend the money, and two young men burned to death.

We now have a situation in Fort Hope where plans to build a proper police detachment to ensure security for the police officers, as well as the citizens, has been derailed by the current government after multiple negotiations. It has simply abandoned it.

We hear from Chief Elizabeth Atlookan, who has written the government, saying that "It is imperative that construction of this new detachment commence immediately as costs for the transportation of materials will increase as the end of the short winter road season".

In writing to their member of Parliament in Kenora, she says, "I request you to do everything possible to secure funding for the construction of this new detachment".

These are communities that live with very narrow building windows, where if we do not get the sign-off to get this police detachment soon and we do not get those supplies up the road, then we will lose another year. In consequence, the police and communities are left at risk, and the cost to the taxpayer goes up and up.

It is the serial incompetence of the government in managing files in the far north that has led us, time and again, to see good projects sit on someone's desk and not be signed off on until the price has gone up 30% or 40%, because every year it gets harder and harder to move supplies up.

This is the situation that we face in our region, so is the lens that we should apply to the issue of devolution.

We support devolution in the Northwest Territories. This is a good, important step. However, taking the regional-municipal water and planning boards and folding them up, despite the opposition of first nations and the concerns raised, is another example of the government just not getting it. It does not understand that if we are to do proper development in Canada, we have to do it credibly and do it in consultation with people. People are not against development, but they want it done right. When we have a good program like devolution, I am very sorry to see the government undermining it and throwing a monkey wrench into it by playing around with the development of the water boards in the region.

● (1520)

[*Translation*]

**Mrs. Anne-Marie Day (Charlesbourg—Haute-Saint-Charles, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I congratulate the member for Timmins—James Bay, who is always concerned about the socio-economic situation of first nations.

I would like him to explain why it is so important to us in the NDP and others to hand over powers to the Northwest Territories and to have it take charge of its own development.

*Government Orders**[English]*

**Mr. Charlie Angus:** Mr. Speaker, there is a difference between the New Democrats and the Conservative government. The Conservatives believe that the territories is their land and that the first nation people living there are somehow to be treated as colonized people. That is why they have stripped away basic protections for the environment. That is why they treat the first nation community as basically a hostage population.

On the other hand, New Democrats believe that our relationship with first nations in this country was a primary relationship forged by Champlain. This new country was to be based on respect between the peoples of this land. The Conservative government has done so much to undermine that sense of respect.

If there is to be resource development in the 21st century, it has to be done in consultation with the people whose land it is, and who have a right to participate but have been marginalized for far too long.

• (1525)

*[Translation]*

**Mr. Pierre-Luc Dusseault (Sherbrooke, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague for his excellent speech here today. He is always concerned about the rights and well-being of aboriginal people, as we have seen in recent years with one of the communities located in his riding.

In the member's opinion, how important are consultations with first nations when decisions are being made that might affect their lands? How important is that in the process the government is supposed to follow when coming up with bills or new programs that could affect first nations? How important are consultations with first nations?

*[English]*

**Mr. Charlie Angus:** Mr. Speaker, the obligation to consult is a constitutional obligation. Attempts to get around this have been beaten in court every single time. That is a basic fact. If development is going to take place on first nation land, then consultation is a must.

It is also about common sense. I saw this at ground level when I worked with the Algonquin nation in Quebec and now I see it with the Cree communities and Ojibway communities. The people on the ground know the facts. For so long they have been treated as outsiders on their own land. If we sit down and talk with communities about how development should occur, then we are going to develop plans that are much better and more sustainable.

In the long term, stronger local economies will be developed when people who used to be marginalized participate in the economy. We see enormous potential in the young people in all of our communities. For far too long they have been kept outside the door as though they were completely unwanted. When we start to include them in the economy, then we will become the country we were meant to be.

Under the Conservative government we are reverting to a colonial mentality, which in the end it will hurt our economic output and hurt development. Mining companies have told me that they are tired of the government's attitude about fighting. They want to move forward

on proper development and want to do it with some kind of long-term plan.

*[Translation]*

**Ms. Françoise Boivin (Gatineau, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I very much appreciated my colleague's speech and I have a question.

The regional land and water boards were created by the Conservative government to give the aboriginal peoples of the Northwest Territories a say in land use planning and water use. I am therefore trying to understand how eliminating these provisions will serve the interests of the people affected.

*[English]*

**Mr. Charlie Angus:** Mr. Speaker, witnesses told us that they were not heard on this issue. Regional water boards are crucial. We can have devolution but we need to maintain that voice at the local level, particularly over the issue of water, because water is not only sacred, it is vital for ensuring a sustainable environmental future.

Again we are seeing the government continue its attack on water protection across this country. This is a retrograde step.

**Ms. Libby Davies (Vancouver East, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to rise today in the House to speak on Bill C-15, an act to replace the Northwest Territories Act to implement certain provisions of the Northwest Territories Lands and Resources Devolution Agreement and to repeal or make amendments to the Territorial Lands Act, the Northwest Territories Waters Act, the Mackenzie Valley Resource Management Act, other acts and certain orders and regulations.

I had the pleasure to speak on this bill at second reading before it went to committee. Although I am not a northerner—I am from the south, from Vancouver, and I represent a very urban community—I must say that I did relate to many of the issues in this bill and the concerns that were expressed about it. In particular, I want to pay tribute to the NDP member for Western Arctic, who has done an incredible amount of work not only on this bill but on the issue generally of the devolution of powers and support of the Northwest Territories. As someone from an urban riding, I appreciate the vastness of the territory that the member represents and all of the communities he has to communicate with to find out what concerns there are on the ground. It is really quite phenomenal, and that I cannot relate to in a geographical sense.

I know that the member for Western Arctic has been painstaking in his journey and his consultations with people. When he speaks to us in the House about Bill C-15 and the concerns about it that he took to committee and the amendments that he tried to get, we know that it comes from the grassroots. It comes from consultations with local communities and individual constituents, and that is why we are here: to bring that kind of information and that grassroots approach into the House.

*Government Orders*

Therefore, when a bill like this comes forward—an historic bill, something that we have been working toward for many decades in terms of devolution, and something that New Democrats have certainly supported for decades to ensure that the Northwest Territories can take over federal responsibilities in the north—it is very disconcerting when local voices are not heard. Unfortunately, I think this is what happened with this bill.

New Democrats supported the bill at second reading. We thought that the bill, in terms of its general principle and its thrust and its journey of devolution, was a very important milestone. We were very hopeful that when the bill went to committee, there would be a thorough examination and that particularly the government members of the committee would come to an understanding that this bill had too much in it. For example, it would make amendments to the Mackenzie Valley agreement that are very problematic and that people in local communities were expressing a lot of concerns about.

I want to thank the NDP members who were on the committee: the member for Nanaimo—Cowichan; the member for Manicouagan; the member for Western Arctic, whom I have spoken about; and the member for Algoma—Manitoulin—Kapusksing. These members worked very hard.

There were only four meetings in which the committee looked at the bill, but it is quite interesting to note that one of the meetings was a nine-and-a-half-hour meeting in Yellowknife. That is very telling. It shows that the committee travelled to the north and listened to witnesses who came to the committee. I have never heard of a committee hearing witnesses for nine and a half hours.

The fact that it was done in the local community tells us that there was a lot of interest in the bill. Obviously there were witnesses who wholeheartedly supported the bill without reservation, but, having read some of the transcripts and having spoken to the member for Western Arctic and others, I know there were people in Yellowknife and in the Northwest Territories who expressed their concerns about the consequences and impacts of this bill.

● (1530)

I want to quote one of the witnesses, Mr. David Bob, who is the vice-president of the Northern Territories Federation of Labour. When I read his comments, I thought he succinctly outlined some of the problems with this bill.

He said:

Bill C-15 should really be split into two distinct bills that can be debated and voted on separately. Combining devolution legislation with amendments to the Mackenzie Valley Resource Management Act is a tortured exercise and one not worthy of a government wishing to be transparent and democratic. While some may quibble over the details and outcomes of devolution, that part of the bill will probably earn general consent from the people of the NWT.

The part of the bill that completely disrupts our existing regulatory system, however, is sure to elicit substantial adverse reactions. The intent of devolution is to transfer greater authority over land and resource decisions to the north and northerners, but we do not believe this would be achieved by the proposed changes to the regulatory regime contained in part 4 of the bill.

As I have said, that is a revealing quote from a key witness on this bill that has now come back to the House. I think the NDP submitted 11 amendments. The Conservatives did not submit any amendments. Two of the NDP amendments were approved, but it is really disconcerting to see some of the fundamental questions about the bill

covering too much by going into the Mackenzie Valley agreement and that it will cause a lot of negative consequences in the local community.

That is unfortunate. Overall, the NDP is still in support of this bill at report stage. We are going through that debate now and then we will go onto third and final reading, but I hope there will be a measure of thoughtfulness once the bill is passed, as I am sure it will, and that there will be a willingness on the part of the government to review this devolution and listen to the concerns of northerners, and that with the practicalities of implementing the devolution and transfer of those powers, the needs of the community will be heard.

Today I was at the Standing Committee on Health, and this issue came up again. Unfortunately, it is all too familiar to us to see what is happening with devolution. We see the federal government wash its hands and say it does not have anything to do with health care anymore and might transfer its programs and services to the Assembly of First Nations or other organizations, but the resources are not provided.

There is still a responsibility for the federal government to provide those resources once the transfer has been made. We see this in health care. I am sure we will not see an acknowledgement in the budget today that the provinces and territories have been short-changed \$36 billion in health care. It is a provincial delivery system, but there is a federal responsibility.

In terms of Bill C-15, which is before us today, unfortunately it is the same old story. Devolution in this circumstance is warranted, it has been asked for, and it is something that we support. However, it is critical that the federal government listen to the local community and not just do the legal transfer. There is more to it than that. The federal government must provide the resources required so that the authority, in this case the Northwest Territories, can carry out its legal responsibility under the agreement.

Those are the observations I have at third reading. I thank my colleagues on the committee who went through the bill, who gave it due diligence, who listened to people, and who made amendments. Unfortunately, most of them were not supported.

We still support the bill, but I can say that we will be vigilant. We will watch this. We will continue to work with northerners and with people in the Northwest Territories, particularly aboriginal first nations people, to make sure the bill is not just a legal document but actually has a positive impact on people in local communities.

● (1535)

**Mrs. Carol Hughes (Algoma—Manitoulin—Kapusksing, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, although my colleague did not sit on the aboriginal committee, obviously she familiarized herself quite a bit with the file. It was quite obvious.

I would like to quote from Dehcho First Nation, which put the following into their brief:

### *Government Orders*

These dramatic amendments are being forced on the Dehcho territory and people. We were not approached to develop a new regulatory system in a spirit of partnership and mutual respect. Rather, we were told what was going to happen, asked to comment, and our comments were pushed aside. This is not consultation, as it utterly lacks the meaningfulness and good faith of a genuine dialogue. Nor does it show any semblance of accommodation.

Again, I think this speaks to how we have seen over and over again that when people have come to comment or have made submissions, they are basically pushed aside. These are the people who are actually on the ground.

Maybe my colleague could indicate how important it is to listen to witnesses, to balance everything, and to go from there when we are making legislation and changes to legislation. In this particular case it is with respect to the land and the water use. I am wondering if my colleague could comment on that.

● (1540)

**Ms. Libby Davies:** Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the comments of the member for Algoma—Manitoulin—Kapusksing. I know she works extremely hard on this committee, as she does generally, and I know that she and other of our members actually did listen to leaders and key stakeholders in the Northwest Territories on the bill. It is very dismaying to see how these concerns are dismissed. Why would the Conservatives basically not bring forward any amendments? Is the bill perfect?

It is a pattern. For any government bill, basically that is it. Even the members at committee from the government side really do not have anything else to do with it.

It is a sad state of affairs for the House, Mr. Speaker. I know you have been here for a while and have seen the progression of how the role of members of Parliament has diminished. The days were when the committee process was healthy and we used to see good amendments coming forward that actually improved bills; that is why they go to committee, but now it is just a formality.

As the member so well outlined, we still take it very seriously, and that is why we do put forward amendments to try to improve a bill based on what we have heard from the witnesses in that community.

**Mr. Ryan Leef (Yukon, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, we are pleased to hear that the New Democrats plan on supporting the bill. What is important to note is that the aboriginal affairs committee was on the ground in Yellowknife recently and spent over nine and a half hours doing direct witness testimony. That was an opportunity for people in Yellowknife to provide that testimony, to provide the experiences they had and share their views with us. That was two weeks' worth of committee hearings done in a full day that provided everyone an ample opportunity.

The Premier of the Northwest Territories confirmed that the aboriginal community was engaged in their territory. That is a duly elected government, a government elected by consensus. We had ministers appear here in Ottawa who also testified that the five-year review period would give them ample time to work through some of the growing pains that might exist, learn from the Yukon Territory example of devolution, and provide recommendations for growth and improvement over a reasonable period of time.

Is the member suggesting that the advice and counsel of a duly elected government of the Northwest Territories is not satisfactory to move the bill forward?

**Ms. Libby Davies:** Mr. Speaker, the member opposite might not be aware, but I actually specifically mentioned that marathon meeting in Yellowknife of nine and a half hours. That was a lot of work for the members as well as for the witnesses who appeared. What the Premier of the Northwest Territories has to say about the bill is very important, but we believe that there is a partnership with aboriginal people in this country, and it is about government to government. It was those voices that unfortunately were not heard.

It is not about the Premier. If he was satisfied, fine, but the fact is that there were very important voices in the aboriginal community in the Northwest Territories who feel they were not heard, and they are still concerned about the bill. That is all the more reason to make sure that this five-year review period is genuine and that there is a proper review to make sure that when changes need to be made, they will be made.

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Françoise Boivin (Gatineau, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, as we sense the anticipation in the House moments before a minimalist budget is brought down, I am going to talk about the problem with this government, which I would describe as a serial offender, since it keeps making the same type of mistake.

We will support Bill C-15 because it is definitely in the interest of the people of the Northwest Territories. It is important to understand that the bill will re-write the constitution of the Northwest Territories.

Often people do not realize that the territories' situation is quite different from that of the provinces. In fact, the powers held by the territorial authorities are established through federal legislation. Over the decades, the federal government has transferred more powers to the territories, but they needed others and there were discussions.

Like my colleague from Vancouver East, I cannot say I am an expert on the matter. I am glad we have experts in our caucus because when the time comes to review these bills and study them, we rely heavily on our experts including the hon. member for Western Arctic, who has done tremendous work, and all the members of the committee who heard the various witnesses regarding this Bill C-15, for example, the hon. member for Nanaimo—Cowichan, the hon. member for Manicouagan and the hon. member for Algoma—Manitoulin—Kapusksing.

Like the hon. member for Vancouver East, I was particularly impressed to see that one meeting lasted nine hours. This allowed the committee to meet many people who will be affected by this type of bill.

I already rose in the House at second reading to speak to the bill. The thing that struck me at the time and that I still find amazing is that implementing this bill will require changes to 42 statutes including the Northwest Territories Act, the Territorial Lands Act, and the Canada Oil and Gas Operations Act.

*Government Orders*

Furthermore, at the November 28, 2013, meeting of the Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development, the deputy minister confirmed that the bill would also amend the Mackenzie Valley Resource Management Act and create an environmental review process for the Northwest Territories, except in the Inuvialuit settlement area. That is significant.

During debate at second reading, we had hoped that the Conservative government would listen and pay attention to the needs of the communities as well as the calls for amendments to the bill. I note that 11 amendments were proposed by the New Democratic Party, none by the Conservatives, five by the Green Party and four by the Liberals. Of these, NDP amendments 1 and 4 were accepted.

I was saying that this is a fairly minimalist government and that the Conservatives are repeat offenders. In fact, every time we go to committee and suggest amendments to improve a bill, more often than not the amendments are rejected. We have committees and meetings, we meet with witnesses, have discussions and listen. Sometimes it feels as though the Conservatives are pretending to listen. In the end, they are not really consulting.

I am always surprised by the Conservatives' use of the term "consultation", especially when it comes to first nations. We saw the Prime Minister apologize in the House to first nations. That gave hope to many people. I think there is nothing worse than to raise people's hopes or make them think one thing and then, when the time comes to make it count, to hit them over the head again and again.

This morning, the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights was studying Bill C-10, and we heard the same complaint that was expressed about Bill C-15, which was that the government failed to consult first nations.

• (1550)

I spoke with them about the electoral reform, which is supposedly about integrity, justice and so on. I told the representatives from the great Mohawks of Kahnawake nation that this government believes that consultation simply means talking and sharing thoughts.

However, if we want to pass bills that make sense and will have the desired effect on peoples' lives, we cannot just give people a brief opportunity to share their thoughts. If they have nine hours to voice their concerns, but we do not actually listen to them, nothing positive will come of it.

That does not mean that Bill C-15 is bad. We will support it because I presume that it is not entirely bad. However, why is the government always content to create something merely acceptable, instead of trying to create bills that take a stand and that are in line with what most people want?

When consulting Canadians about Bill C-10, the government will be content with a few meetings and with hearing some concerns, but there will not be any real nation to nation negotiation. The same is happening here, according to what we are hearing from some witnesses.

The same is happening with electoral reform: consulting the CEO just means that someone will meet with him and give him the opportunity to share his thoughts. It does not mean that the

government told him what it wanted to do and how it wanted to do it, or asked for his opinion. Unfortunately, that is what is at stake here with this type of issue.

I am delighted that the government accepted two of the 11 amendments. I would like to commend my colleagues who are part of the committee, the members for Nanaimo—Cowichan, Manicouagan, Western Arctic and Algoma—Manitoulin—Kapuskasing. Members of many other committees will be jealous of their success, namely getting two of the 11 proposed amendments adopted.

However, I would really like this government to realize that, just because the official opposition puts forward amendments, that does not always reflect negatively on the government's proposals. It is more about creating legislation that makes sense. Once again, this agreement is going to result in amendments to 42 acts, including the Northwest Territories Act, the Territorial Lands Act, the Canada Oil and Gas Operations Act and, the real crux of the issue, the Mackenzie Valley Resource Management Act.

This government clearly does not give a darn about the environment. Several aspects of this act will have repercussions on the environment and our natural resources. The government would do well to get ahead of the game and prevent problems, so that it does not end up in court for decades again because treaties have not been honoured.

When you do not listen to people or you pretend to listen to them but do not really hear what they are saying, problems arise later. This is what the official opposition, in its great wisdom, often tries to tell this government, which is completely deaf to everything that comes from anywhere else but the little bubble around the Prime Minister.

I know that Bill C-15 is exciting for just about everyone in the House at the moment. It is much more interesting than what we are going to hear for the next 30 minutes, which is not a lot. That will be colourless, odourless and tasteless once more, unfortunately, because this government is a petty government.

[*English*]

**The Deputy Speaker:** Could I ask those members in the chamber who do not want to ask a question to please take their seats?

The hon. Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development.

• (1555)

**Mr. Mark Strahl (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure to enter into this debate again. The gallery is full and the House is filling up to hear my intervention.

The Premier of the Northwest Territories made it very clear when he appeared before the committee in Yellowknife. He said:

We need an efficient and effective regulatory system in the Northwest Territories that protects the public interest, allows us to manage our land and environment, and promotes responsible development.

The Northwest Territories mineral development strategy says:

*The Budget*

By creating a strong regulatory framework that clearly outlines consultation requirements, processes and timing, companies will have increased clarity regarding regulatory process expectations....

The GNWT needs to support the timely completion and lead the effective implementation of Canada's Regulatory Reform Action Plan.

I know the hon. member did congratulate the committee for accepting two NDP amendments. I wonder if she will also join with us in congratulating the Government of the Northwest Territories on achieving devolution? It is just a short time away. We congratulate the NDP for supporting the bill, but perhaps she could comment on the premier's comments about the need for an effective and efficient regulatory system.

[Translation]

**Ms. Françoise Boivin:** Mr. Speaker, I have no problem doing that. It would be nice—and I dream of that day—if the Conservatives, or at least one of them, rose in the House to say that they realize that their bill is flawed and that they realize that a number of people do not entirely agree with what they are proposing. I dream of the day when, instead of being labelled enemies of power, we will be perceived as people who are trying to improve things.

We can all play games and list the number of people who side with us and agree with our way of thinking, but I think it is more productive to try to ensure that no one takes issue with what I am presenting. Some might say that is utopian and naive, but that is not true, not if we actively listen and do not turn a deaf ear to anything that did not come from our side.

[English]

**Ms. Yvonne Jones (Labrador, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, the Liberal Party certainly congratulates the premier and the Government of the Northwest Territories on achieving devolution, which has been a long-lasting dream of the people in that area. It is unfortunate that, since the former Liberal government signed it, it has taken more than eight years for the government opposite to negotiate it.

What we do not congratulate is the fact that the government has not empowered aboriginal people, through its amendments to the Mackenzie Valley Resource Management Act. Many of these aboriginal governments feel their rights have been infringed upon and their constitutional agreements, which they negotiated as part of land claims, are not being adhered to or taken seriously by the government opposite.

Could my colleague explain if she feels this way, and is that her understanding from the representations that we had from many people across the Northwest Territories?

[Translation]

**Ms. Françoise Boivin:** Mr. Speaker, it saddens me greatly to be getting lessons from people from that side of the House.

Where were they when they had a majority? Where were they when they could have made all those changes? Why wait for a minority government, when it is impossible to reach an agreement? Why wait for a Conservative government that does not believe in nation to nation negotiations with the first nations?

In my opinion, neither the Conservatives nor the Liberals have any lessons to teach anyone. Yes, we are pleased that they are taking

a step in the right direction. They just have to actively listen and hold meaningful consultations instead of waiting for problems to arise.

[English]

**The Speaker:** The time for questions and comments has expired.

Is the House ready for the question?

The hon. member for Saanich—Gulf Islands is rising on a point of order.

• (1600)

**Ms. Elizabeth May (Saanich—Gulf Islands, GP):** Mr. Speaker, I believe that this debate was not closed until all the people who wanted had had an opportunity to speak. I thought there were still some openings for speeches remaining. Is that not the case?

**The Speaker:** If there are other members willing to speak, they can. Is the member rising to be recognized for a speech?

Therefore, the House is not ready for the question. However, it is almost 4 o'clock, so perhaps when the bill is next before the House, I will recognize the hon. member for Saanich—Gulf Islands.

**Hon. John Duncan:** Mr. Speaker, I request that the vote be deferred until tomorrow at the close of government orders.

**The Speaker:** There will not be a vote now. There will be a resumption of debate when the bill is next before the House. The hon. member for Saanich—Gulf Islands will have the floor the next time that the bill is before the House.

• (1605)

[Translation]

**Mr. Yvon Godin:** Mr. Speaker, in the budget document, on the first page, page i, under “Ensuring Training Reflects Labour Market Needs”, it reads:

[English]

“Ready, Willing and Able” is an initiative to help Canadians...”. It is only in English, and I feel it is against the rules of the House to have a document only—

**The Speaker:** The documents have just been tabled. I will have a look at what the hon. member has said and we can deal with it in a few moments.

It being 4 p.m., the House will now proceed to the consideration of Ways and Means Proceeding No. 6 concerning the budget presentation.

\* \* \*

[Translation]

**THE BUDGET**

FINANCIAL STATEMENT OF THE MINISTER OF FINANCE

**Hon. Jim Flaherty (Minister of Finance, CPC)** moved:

That this House approve in general the budgetary policy of the government.

He said: Mr. Speaker, I wish to table the budget documents for 2014, including notices of ways and means motions.

*The Budget*

•(1610)

[English]

The details of the measures are contained in these documents, and I am asking that an order of the day be designated for consideration of these motions.

I also wish to announce that the government will introduce legislation to implement the measures in the budget.

Mr. Speaker, nearly 150 years ago, Canada was founded with fiscal responsibility as its cornerstone. The men and women who carved this great country out of the wilderness simply called it “good government”. That is what minister of finance John Rose was talking about when he stood before this assembly to deliver Canada's first budget speech in 1868. He said, “I say that we ought to be most careful in our outlay, and consider well every shilling we expend”. That's just old-fashioned English for old-fashioned common sense, and it is that solid Canadian common sense that has guided our government through good times and bad.

I am proud to rise today to present Canada's economic action plan 2014. This prudent plan builds on our record of strong, sound, and consistent fiscal management. It is a low-tax plan to promote jobs and economic growth and support Canadian families, and it is a common sense plan that will see Canada return to a balanced budget in 2015.

Economic action plan 2014 sticks to the principles that we adopted when I rose to deliver our government's first budget in 2006 during good times. I was six foot four then. Things got a little rough.

What did our government do then, when few could see dark clouds on the horizon? We paid down our federal debt. We lowered taxes for families and job creators. We made sure that our fiscal house was in order. Why did we do this? We did it because it was the responsible way to a brighter future for Canadians.

Financial prudence now leads to financial prosperity in the future. It leads to opportunity.

[Translation]

And so it was that when economic bad times came, our country was better prepared than most.

Since the depths of the recession, Canada has led the G7 in job creation.

Coming out of the recession, Canada had a triple-A credit rating with a stable outlook—which was and still is virtually unmatched among our peers.

We have the best net debt-to-GDP ratio among G7 nations.

There are many reasons to be optimistic.

•(1615)

[English]

There are signs of recovery around us, but there are also troubled waters. The world economy is still fragile. One need look no further than Europe and the emerging economies to see that.

Here at home, household debt is still higher than we would like to see.

[Translation]

And there are still too many Canadians looking for work, and too many employers looking for workers.

There is still work to be done.

[English]

Mr. Speaker, it will not surprise you that my favourite Father of Confederation is Thomas D'Arcy McGee, who once said, “We are in the rapids and must go on”. Even as the times get better again, we will stay the course that has worked so well.

My other favourite Father of Confederation, Sir John A. Macdonald, could have been talking about our economic action plan when he said, “the Government are merely trustees for the public”. That is why we are so committed to balancing the budget and returning Canada to a position of fiscal strength.

When governments run prolonged deficits, they are spending money that belongs to future generations. Deficit spending endangers social programs we benefit from and that our children will soon depend on.

[Translation]

We also recognize that balanced budgets are important to the long-term prosperity of this country, inspiring confidence in investors and consumers, whose dollars grow the economy and create jobs.

This also ensures that interest rates stay low.

Canadians have trusted us with the economy, and we have delivered.

[English]

As we have promised, our government remains committed to balancing the budget in 2015, but I must be clear. We did not do this on the backs of ordinary Canadians or Canadians in need. We did not cut the programs Canadians rely on. We did not cut transfers to our provinces and territories, money they use for things like education and health care. Rather, we did this by getting our own fiscal house in order. That is exactly how our government will continue.

Our government has reduced direct program spending for the third year in a row. That is something no other government has done in decades.

[Translation]

Our Government continues to eliminate waste that will cut the cost of government without cutting programs Canadians depend on. Going forward, the government will freeze the operating expenses of departments and we will continue to divest government assets when in the best interest of Canadians to do so.

*The Budget**[English]*

By doing these things, we will not only balance the budget in 2015, we will achieve a surplus. However, again let me be clear, a return to surplus is not a licence to spend recklessly.

● (1620)

*[Translation]*

What we will do—what we have always done—is stay the course.

*[English]*

We will make sure Canada's fiscal position remains strong, strong enough to weather any future global economic storms. That starts with paying down the debt and keeping taxes low. Even in the toughest economic times, our government has worked hard to reduce the tax burden for Canadian families and Canadian businesses.

In fact, the federal tax burden is the lowest it has been in 50 years. Since taking office, we have delivered more than 160 tax-relief measures; lowered the GST to 5% from 7%; introduced pension-income splitting for seniors; and created the working income tax benefit, WITB, to help ensure that low-income workers are better off by taking a job.

*[Translation]*

Now, an average family of four pays \$3,400 less in tax in a year. But we also know that taxes help fund programs and services Canadians rely on. And we will keep closing tax loopholes so every Canadian pays their fair share.

*[English]*

By keeping taxes low, we have created the best environment for business investment in the G7, and those businesses create jobs for Canadians. Creating jobs and creating opportunities remain our government's top priorities. We already have the best record for job creation in the G7 countries. Since the depths of the economic recession, employment has increased by more than one million people. These jobs are overwhelmingly full-time and in the private sector.

*[Translation]*

And we are making sure that opportunities are there for everyone.

*[English]*

We have invested in apprenticeship programs and measures to increase the numbers of people with disabilities, young people, and aboriginal Canadians in the workforce, by helping them find the job training they need.

However, there is more we can and will do. That is why today I am pleased to announce the Canada apprentice loan, which will give apprentices registered in Red-Seal trades access to interest-free student loans. Millions of other Canadians have benefited from student loans before, but apprentices have not and, as I say, the loans would be interest-free.

That is why the Prime Minister announced more than \$1.9 billion in new funding to implement the first nations control of first nations education act.

Canada has one of the best educated workforces in the world. In fact, the number of Canadians under 25 with university degrees has gone up by more than 50% since 2002. Still, getting that first job after finishing college or university can be challenging.

● (1625)

*[Translation]*

To help young people get the first, critical work experience they need, our government will focus investment to support internships in high-demand fields and in small and medium-size businesses.

As well, we will support two programs that will help people with disabilities find jobs and stay employed.

Ready, Willing & Able is an initiative to help Canadians with intellectual disabilities become part of the workforce.

We will also invest in a program to help young people with autism find rewarding jobs.

*[English]*

We will also implement an enhanced job match service to help unemployed Canadians get back to work by connecting them with employers looking to hire individuals with their skill set.

We will also introduce a new expression of interest system to ensure that Canada has an efficient, flexible immigration system that matches the needs of employers.

*[Translation]*

Canada leads the G7 when it comes to investing in post-secondary research.

And we know that investments in science and technology help Canadian business remain competitive while creating high-paying jobs.

*[English]*

That is why we have invested more than \$11 billion in new resources since 2006 to support science, technology, and innovative companies that are opening new frontiers for Canada.

That is why I am very pleased today to announce our government's investment in the Canada first research excellence fund. The fund will support the strategic research priorities of Canada's post-secondary institutions. It will help them excel globally in research areas that create long-term economic advantages for Canada.

In addition, budget 2014 includes the largest yearly increase in funding for research through the granting councils in over a decade.

In Canada's very first budget speech, finance minister John Rose said:

What this country wants is care and judgment in the development of its resources.

*The Budget*

Those words still ring true today. That is why our government is promoting safe, responsible resource development that is not bogged down by unnecessary red tape. Minister Rose also said:

...we must not neglect the means necessary to bring our products of all kinds to a profitable market.

This is also true today, especially when it comes to energy. Making sure that Canadian energy remains available to markets around the world is a priority for this government. That is why I am happy to announce today that economic action plan 2014 sets aside funds for review of projects like the energy east pipeline proposal.

In addition, as Canada has always been an exporting nation, our investment in the new Windsor-Detroit crossing means that Canadian goods will go to market faster, allowing businesses to grow, expand trade, and help to secure a prosperous future.

• (1630)

[Translation]

Our government is committed to protecting Canada's environment.

And that commitment is evident in our ongoing investment in national parks.

[English]

In fact, since coming to office, we have added more than 160,000 square kilometres to our national parks and marine conservation system. These priceless natural and historical places are a spectacular legacy for our children, and we must ensure they remain pristine; and we are, and we will.

I am pleased to announce that our government is investing to maintain these national treasures for the next generation to enjoy. We will make substantial investments through Parks Canada to improve the highways, bridges, and dams located in our national parks and along our historic canals.

We also know that partnering with committed citizen groups can make conservation dollars stretch farther. That is why we introduced the recreational fisheries conservation partnership program, which doubled the impact of every dollar invested in its first year.

Today, we are increasing our commitment to protect even more sensitive fish habitat in the future.

[Translation]

Canada is blessed with a network of recreational trails that allow Canadians to connect with nature all year round.

It pleases me to announce that our government will partner with the National Trails Coalition to make this recreational experience even better, fulfilling another of our 2011 platform commitments.

[English]

Families are the lifeblood of every community. Our government is working hard to ensure that Canadian families are protected in their communities. As part of these efforts, we will create a DNA-based missing persons index to help bring some peace to the families of missing persons. For that, I want to thank Judy Peterson.

[Translation]

We are also standing up for hard-working families trying to make ends meet.

Our consumers first agenda will help ensure that Canadians are also protected in the marketplace.

When Canadian families spend their hard-earned money, they should be confident that they are being treated fairly in a competitive marketplace.

[English]

That is why we took steps to increase competition in the wireless sector, which has reduced wireless rates by 20%.

That is why we are taking steps to lower wholesale roaming rates within Canada and giving the CRTC the power to impose financial penalties on companies that do not comply with the rules.

We will also introduce legislation to address the price gap between identical goods sold in Canada and the United States.

We will also continue our investments in Canada's food safety system by hiring more inspectors to ensure that the food destined for Canadian dinner tables is safe.

• (1635)

[Translation]

We will prohibit the pay-to-pay practice that charges consumers for paper bills—including printed credit card statements.

[English]

Reducing red tape for charities by enabling them to apply for registration and file their annual returns electronically is also a step we will take.

We will also make major investments in access to broadband in rural and northern areas.

I am proud of our government's record of fiscal restraint and good management.

[Translation]

Our record, during the worst economic crisis of our lifetime, has been the envy of the world.

[English]

This record has been the envy of the world. I believe we have been, as Sir John A. wanted us to be, trustees for the public.

[Translation]

I know that I speak on behalf of all my colleagues when I say that we are truly grateful to all Canadians for putting their trust in us.

*The Budget**[English]*

I know that I speak on behalf of my colleagues when I say that we are truly grateful to all Canadians for putting their trust in us. We have worked hard and we will continue to work hard to, as D'Arcy McGee said:

...strengthen the faith of our people in their own future, the faith of every Canadian in Canada....

The plan unveiled today is another prudent step toward that brighter future.

**Ms. Peggy Nash (Parkdale—High Park, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I thank the minister for his speech. I kept waiting for the budget.

There are 1.4 million Canadians unemployed. There is ten per cent of people in the city of Toronto who are unemployed. Canada has the weakest job creation since the great recession. Tens of thousands of Canadians are dropping out of the labour force. It is difficult times for all Canadians, but our youth are being hit the hardest of all. Why is there absolutely nothing in the budget for the vast majority of Canada's young workers? Why is the government abandoning them?

**Hon. Jim Flaherty:** Mr. Speaker, apprentices, mentoring programs, paid intern programs, the auto sector, the forestry sector, the mining sector, special tax rates for manufacturers so they can hire more people, which they do, are all included in our plan. This is a long-term plan and it is working.

**An hon. member:** Give them the page number.

**Hon. Jim Flaherty:** I am sure the member opposite would rather read the budget than have a fine dinner tonight.

• (1640)

**Hon. John McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I too would like to congratulate the finance minister for delivering his eighth deficit budget in a row, something in the order of \$160 billion to the national debt and \$5,000 for each man, woman, and child.

Could the minister tell us whether the budget will be followed by a budget implementation bill that will be an omnibus bill once again? Could he tell us whether there will be an advertising budget for non-existent programs during the Stanley Cup playoffs and the Olympics? Could he confirm that he will be moving \$4 billion to defer military spending in order to balance the budget? Could he tell us whether the \$17 billion increase in projected revenues, more than any previous year and more than any subsequent year, is based on what, other than election speculation?

**Hon. Jim Flaherty:** Mr. Speaker, there were a lot of questions there.

Let me answer the question that I think actually has some merit. When members look at the budget, they will see that there is some spending that has been pushed forward for the armed forces. This is for infrastructure in the armed forces, for procurement.

It is because the expense cannot be incurred this year or next year. Therefore we are moving it forward, because the money cannot be used this year or next year. It is not a cut. The money is there to be used, but the equipment has to be ready to be manufactured and purchased.

**Mr. Bob Zimmer (Prince George—Peace River, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, on behalf of all members of Parliament and all Canadians, I would like to thank Canada's Minister of Finance for tabling his tenth consecutive budget.

Across Canada and especially in my home province of British Columbia, search and rescue volunteers play a vital role in keeping our communities safe and secure. Given that many men and women put their lives at risk to help with search and rescue missions, I ask the minister what economic action plan 2014 will do to help these brave volunteers.

**Hon. Jim Flaherty:** Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for his question. Prince George—Peace River is fortunate to have him as member of Parliament.

Our government respects the brave men and women who put their lives at risk, like Tim Jones of British Columbia, who died on January 19 this year after 26 years with the North Shore Rescue team.

Economic action plan 2014 introduces the search and rescue volunteers tax credit. Eligible ground, air, and marine search and rescue workers will be able to claim a 15% tax credit. They must perform 200 or more hours of volunteer search and rescue service to qualify. I thank the member for the idea.

*[Translation]*

**Mr. Guy Caron (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, the sudden and unexpected elimination of the immigrant investor program for business assistance puts venture capital in Quebec at risk. The Government of Quebec ensures that almost 50% of the money collected through the program goes to small and medium-size businesses that are promising but vulnerable. This is clearly another measure that could have a significant impact on a major economic lever. I am referring to venture capital in Quebec after the tax credit for labour-sponsored venture capital funds is eliminated.

I would like the minister to tell me who was consulted on this proposed reform. Did he at least consult the Government of Quebec? How will the elimination of the program affect Quebec? Also, what are the details of the new pilot project that will replace it?

**Hon. Jim Flaherty:** Mr. Speaker, the member knows that the Government of Quebec has its own program, independent of the Government of Canada. The changes are being made by the Government of Quebec.

*[English]*

**Mr. Rodger Cuzner (Cape Breton—Canso, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I know the Minister of Finance is an avid golfer. He might want to consider taking a mulligan on this one.

*The Budget*

Today's budget creates a totally disingenuous surplus through cuts to equipment for our troops, through the sale of assets at yard sale prices, and through an artificially high EI payroll tax. The minister knows full well that the EI account is set to balance at the end of this year, but by not letting the rates fall, he is leaving an added payroll burden on employers across this country and, in turn, stifling job development.

Will the minister reconsider this blatant mistake in policy and unlock the premium rates?

• (1645)

**Hon. Jim Flaherty:** Mr. Speaker, we have had this debate in this place before, and also with the provincial and territorial ministers.

Employers and employees in Canada today, in a fragile economy, do not need additional burdens. What they need is as much money as they can get from their hard work to support themselves and their families.

For this reason, we froze EI rates.

**Mr. Mike Wallace (Burlington, CPC):** Mr. Speaker, on behalf of all Canadians, let me congratulate the minister for his work in returning Canada to a balanced budget in 2015. While other countries struggle with their finances, Canada is showing the world that strong fiscal management is the right path for job creation and economic growth.

On a personal note, I want to thank the minister for including the missing person's index in this budget. I worked on that as a private members' bill eight years ago.

I would also like to thank the minister for his work on supporting charities and on encouraging charitable giving in Canada. Given the important work charities do in every community, what will economic action plan 2014 do to help charities?

**Hon. Jim Flaherty:** Mr. Speaker, I thank the learned member for Burlington for his service on the House of Commons finance committee and for his work with the chair, the member for Edmonton—Leduc. That committee has given advice on making it more efficient for charities to operate by permitting them to operate electronically with the CRA, for the first time ever; allowing charities to use modern technology, like computers, when fundraising; and encouraging Canadians to voluntarily donate land to conservation charities with increased tax relief. All of these measures are contained in the budget, and I thank the committee for its hard work.

**Ms. Peggy Nash (Parkdale—High Park, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I thank the Minister of Finance for his comments. However, I have to say that he did not oversell this budget. It truly is what he promised: a do-nothing budget. He certainly has lived up to that.

There are almost 300,000 more Canadians unemployed today than before the recession, people who are very concerned about their and their families' economic futures.

There is a whole generation of young people who are looking to the government for some hope and opportunity. I dare say that they are all sadly disappointed.

Clearly the government is delaying any new ideas and initiatives until next year, when it is more politically advantageous for itself, which is a cynical approach to the many families who are struggling so hard across this country. I do not think those middle-class and working families, who are being nickel-and-dimed every day by measures the government has taken no action on, appreciate the government playing politics with their incomes and their day-to-day lives.

The government has focused instead on challenging those who would raise voices of opposition, such as public servants, labour unions, and environmental groups, who are very concerned about the chill it is creating across the country when it comes to basic civil liberties.

We are also concerned that the government has taken no action to improve the lot of veterans who are concerned about the cuts to services in many communities across this country.

There are some measures the New Democrats have proposed, like banning pay-to-pay billing, which the government has said it would act on. We will wait to see if it will follow through on that. We have seen announcements like this before.

We notice that there is nothing on bank fees, ATM fees, or credit card fees. Many of the no-cost measures that would make the lives of Canadians more affordable are totally missing from this budget, not to mention the ecoENERGY home retrofit tax credit, which would have been a job creation measure, which the government has not announced.

We have great concerns about this budget. We are looking forward to returning to the House tomorrow to speak further to the budget.

With that, I move:

That the debate be now adjourned.

(Motion agreed to)

• (1650)

**The Speaker:** Pursuant to Standing Order 83(2) the motion is deemed adopted and the House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 2 p.m.

(The House adjourned at 4:51 p.m.)



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