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Friday, June 3, 1994

Speaker: The Honourable Gilbert Parent

HOUSE OF COMMONS

Friday, June 3, 1994

The House met at 10 a.m.

Prayers

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[*English*]

ELECTORAL BOUNDARIES READJUSTMENT SUSPENSION ACT, 1994

The House proceeded to the consideration of amendments made by the Senate to Bill C-18, an act to suspend the operation of the Electoral Boundaries Readjustment Act.

Hon. Herb Gray (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Solicitor General of Canada): I move:

That the amendments made by the Senate to Bill C-18, an act to suspend the operation of the Electoral Boundaries Readjustment Act, be concurred in with the exception of amendment 1 in clause 2 to which this House proposes the following amendment:

Strike out "the sixth day of February" and substitute "June 22".

And that a Message be sent to the Senate to acquaint Their Honours therewith.

He said: Madam Speaker, in proposing the motion I wish to take the opportunity to reaffirm the government's intention and desire to have in place an impartial readjustment of electoral boundaries based on the 1991 census for any election to be held at the end of a normal life of a Parliament with a majority government. I am speaking of an election in 1997 or 1998.

(1005)

We think the original timetable proposed in Bill C-18 would have permitted this to happen. Bill C-18 proposed a two-year suspension of the process while the entire process was itself being reviewed by a parliamentary committee. We did not consider this to be a minimum time for such a review but a maximum time setting an outside limit for completing the review and passing the necessary legislation.

By order of the House, the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs has been instructed to bring in legislation to update this process, with an ultimate deadline for a report for

this purpose of December 16, 1994. This is the date when the House is scheduled to begin its winter adjournment which, under the rules of the House, ends on February 6, 1995.

It would be only after that date that the rest of the legislative process on any bill would be undertaken. I am speaking of a further committee stage, report stage and third reading in the House. Then there would have to be consideration in the Senate.

It was our opinion, given the always unpredictable nature of demands on parliamentary time, that a two-year timetable for new legislation was not unreasonable even though, as I said, we regarded this not as a minimum but a maximum time.

It has since become clear, however, that there is some considerable concern in parts of the country that this maximum would become a minimum and therefore that the provision for a two-year suspension appeared to make it impossible for an election in 1997 or 1998 to be held on the basis of new boundaries.

The amendments proposed by the Senate do attempt to address this concern. The amendments in effect would provide that the suspension of the process would last only until February 6, 1995, and if no change to the process were legislated by that date the existing process would automatically be resumed where it left off.

It is the government's intention to reassure the public of our desire that a general election taking place at the end of the normal term of the present Parliament be held on the basis of the 1991 census. Therefore we are prepared to accept the Senate formulation except on one point, and that is we do not view the date of February 6, 1995 as being appropriate or realistic.

As I have said, this date does not recognize the timetable already ordered by the House for the preparation of new legislation on this matter. It does not recognize the provisions of the rules of the House for an adjournment between December 16, 1994 and February 6, 1995. It represents, it could be said, an inappropriate involvement by the Senate in the right of the House of Commons to set its own agenda. After all, the House ordered on April 19 that a committee prepare legislation no later than December 16 of this year, the date on which as I have said under the rules of the House we will be adjourning until February 6.

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It must be emphasized that it is already the stated intention of the House of Commons, expressed by its order, not just the intention of the government, to have the procedure committee bring in legislation to reform and update the process of redistribution.

There are many areas the committee will likely want to consider. Some have been raised already when the bill was before the House at earlier stages of debate. I am sure they will be discussed again in detail in the committee hearings and when the committee reports. However today I do not intend to anticipate what may be in the report or presume to suggest what the committee may have in the report in question.

(1010)

I intend to conclude by saying that the government concurs in the Senate amendments but asks for one amendment to them, that is that the legislation have a more realistic timetable in it for the completion of the review, a June 22, 1995 date rather than a February 6, 1995 date.

Therefore the government asks the House to accept the Senate amendments subject to the amendment I have put forward to create a more realistic timetable.

[Translation]

Mr. Maurice Bernier (Mégantic—Compton—Stanstead): Madam Speaker, we find ourselves in a rather unique situation this morning. Only a few months ago, the government introduced a bill in this House to delay the electoral boundaries adjustment process. Bill C-18 called for a two-year postponement of the boundaries review process and for the dismantling of commissions responsible for travelling across Canada to hear the views of citizens about the redrawing of their riding's boundaries.

The arguments which were put forward by government representatives, by Liberal Party members, and which were supported by the official opposition were based on two points: first, since the members of the 35th Parliament were elected on October 25, 1993, the next elections would not, in all likelihood, be held until sometime in 1997 or 1998.

Therefore, there was no rush to redraw electoral boundaries. During the debate, the government said it could take all the time it needed to ensure that certain criteria were taken into account during this process, criteria such as the number of voters, of course, and also attachment to a particular region. Therefore, let me say again that the government, supported by the official opposition, agreed to vote in favour of this bill to postpone the process for the next two years.

A few weeks later, the leader of the Conservative Party and the hon. member for Sherbrooke, a great democrat if ever there was one, joined forces with the Conservative majority in the

Senate and together, they decided to take on the mantle of defenders of democracy. They decided to propose some amendments to Bill C-18, claiming, I say again, to be the defenders of democracy.

(1015)

Let me point out several inconsistencies in this position. During the last election campaign, the member for Sherbrooke and leader of the Conservative Party, at least what remains of it, claimed in his ads running several times a day in Quebec that to be effective in the House of Commons, one needed to be part of the government.

The hon. member for Sherbrooke and leader of the Conservative Party argued, unlike the Bloc Québécois candidates, that the real power was not in opposition, but on the government side because, to his mind, that is where decisions about the running of the country were made, not in the opposition ranks.

The member for Sherbrooke and leader of the Conservative Party also said that the opposition operates behind the scenes and that opposition members have no real power in the House of Commons. This was what the leader of the Conservative Party and member for Sherbrooke claimed and this debate is eloquent proof indeed of what he meant.

Since he views the role of the opposition as that of lobbyists, like he indicated during the election campaign, he immediately set to work, hardly ever participating in the regular business of the House, preferring to lobby senators into embarrassing the government. I do not mean to ascribe intentions to him, but he may have had in mind the days when, with a Liberal majority, the Senate manoeuvred to create difficulties for the Conservative government in passing significant legislation like the GST or free trade. We all remember those days.

But the Senate is now comprised mostly of Conservative senators, although it may be more appropriate to call it purple than blue, because several of these senators side now with the Liberals, now with the Conservatives. If you mix blue and red, you get purple.

The leader of the Conservative Party and member for Sherbrooke, no doubt a fervent defender of democracy, persuaded the Conservative senators that amendments had to be made to Bill C-18 to ensure that the Upper House could impose its agenda on the government.

(1020)

The inconsistency is striking here. During the election campaign, the Conservative leader said that the real power was on the side of the government. Yet, the first thing he did in opposition, aside from not attending any of the debates in this House, was precisely to get busy in the wings, to use the Senate, and its Conservative majority, to interfere with the intentions of

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the government and the House of Commons. In my mind, that is miscarriage of democracy.

Now that masks have been shed, we can see what the Conservative leader and member for Sherbrooke is really after. Amazingly, the Liberal government goes along with him. We really need to be clear on what is going on. I will come back in a moment to the role of the Senate. When Bill C-18 was introduced in this House, as the Solicitor General said just a moment ago, both the government and the Official Opposition intended to ensure time was taken to do serious work on this bill, instead of proceeding hastily at the risk of finding ourselves in impossible situations later on.

Several government members and several members of the Official Opposition spoke in this debate to explain the tragic, disastrous effects the changes proposed by the electoral boundaries readjustment commission will have on people's lives. I for one described the problems affecting my riding of Mégantic—Compton—Stanstead in this House. The commission planned to literally turn the riding of Mégantic—Compton—Stanstead upside down in the most incredibly thoughtless fashion, attaching one part of the riding to another riding with which it had no ties, either sociologically or in terms of business communications, and also communications between constituents and their elected representatives, or in terms their dealings with the government.

Many examples were given. I would say that just about every hon. member spoke of adverse effects the proposed changes would have on their ridings. Never, on the side of the Official Opposition, did we want or intend to interfere with the electoral boundaries readjustment process by preventing the commission from making any changes before the next election.

We said that this two-year timeframe—as, may I remind you, the Solicitor General just reiterated—can be seen as the maximum amount of time needed to make intelligent changes, to take into account the number of voters per riding and to ensure that in the next election campaign—in which we in the Official Opposition do not wish to participate—riding redistribution will be based on data from the 1991 census rather than the 1981 census.

(1025)

Everyone agreed. And everyone still agrees today that we have all the time we need to ensure that intelligent public hearings will be held in Quebec and throughout Canada, that the proposed amendments will be tabled in this House, and that a bill can be passed in time for these changes to be in place before the next election.

I want to look at an argument that was used not only by columnists and Liberal Party faithful during their last convention but also by our friends from the Reform Party and others,

namely that delaying the process would forestall any changes and that we in the Official Opposition act as though we do not want to take the number criterion into account. We do think that this criterion is important. There must be a kind of balance, of equity in the demographic weight of the various ridings.

That is not the only criterion to be considered, however. That is another reason why we in the Official Opposition support postponing the review process. We wanted to ask the House committee to review these criteria and we will do so in a few weeks. At the beginning of July, hearings will be held by the parliamentary committee to review the criteria used by the commission to redraw the electoral map.

Agreeing to review these criteria is one more argument in favour of deferring the process. If we accept the fact that the current redistribution criteria must be revised, we should, I think, immediately admit that we must suspend the review process, wait for the decisions on these new criteria and then go out and consult the people throughout Quebec and Canada, to ensure that the proposed changes respect the will of the people and the new criteria that will be adopted.

After hearing the government position that the Solicitor General has just outlined, we must come to the conclusion that, under pressure from the senators and from Liberal militants at their last convention, the government has decided to go back on its word and to ensure that the process will be shorter than the two years set out in Bill C-18. Strangely, as I mentioned earlier, it shows that the process initiated by the leader of the Conservative Party was right. We must keep this in mind. Madam Speaker, this means that the leader of the Conservative Party, with a caucus of two members in this House, is the one leading the government. Our friends opposite must realize that they are being led by the leader of a party that has almost no members left in this House. Is that democracy? I doubt it. I see democracy differently.

(1030)

We must also realize that this political game, because that is what it is, is supported by individuals who were never elected anywhere, and I refer to the senators. As we know, they are appointed by the government for all sorts of reasons, but especially for their political connections. It has been well known for a long time. Since our institutions were created, the senators' role has been to look after very important issues on occasion, I agree, but more often than not, to look after the affairs of their party, be it Conservative or Liberal.

The unelected senators are teaching a lesson in democracy to us, members of Parliament who have been democratically elected by all the voters in our ridings. So what legitimacy does the Senate have to act in an issue like this? It is totally ridiculous. Just being here in the House today dealing with

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Senate amendments on the redrawing of electoral boundaries, which lies at the very heart of our democratic system, is absurd.

Unelected senators, some of whom are there simply to ensure that the traditional parties have enough money in their election fund, are telling us elected members: "You did your job badly. You are undemocratic. You do not represent the will of the people and we in our ivory tower know what the people need. We know what you must do and we are imposing it on you".

Madam Speaker, I just cannot get over it. We must remember this date, June 3, 1994, when unelected people were able to impose their agenda on the government which was elected barely six months ago. I would also like to point out that for many years, Quebec has been represented in the House of Commons in proportion to its share of the population; that is, about 25 per cent of the members of the House of Commons come from Quebec, which is the same as Quebec's share of the population.

(1035)

Among the changes proposed by the commission, a certain number of ridings are to be added. In fact, two ridings would be added in British Columbia and four in Ontario, for a total of six, raising the number of members sitting in the House of Commons from 295 to 301. For one thing, this would lower Quebec's share of the representation in this House and of course, something not to be overlooked, it would increase government spending, because six more members would cost the taxpayers of Canada and Quebec more money.

We must send a clear message since Bill C-18, as was also agreed during the negotiations surrounding Meech, protects Quebec's relative weight, that is a representation equivalent to 25 per cent of the total in the House of Commons. In our future decisions, we should always keep in mind—and I say this for the benefit of government and Reform Party members—that Quebecers represent approximately one quarter of the Canadian population. As long as Quebec remains part of Canada, this proportion should be reflected here in the House of Commons.

As for the addition of new members, we are not in a position right now to increase government spending. Everyone in the House agrees on that. I think the government, the Official Opposition and the Reform Party are unanimous to say that, at least, government spending should not increase. We, as well as our friends from the Reform Party, even hope for a review of all expenditures and budget items, in an effort to reduce government spending.

So, why create new jobs for additional MPs? I think there are more important issues to solve than to find jobs in this House for a few more individuals. During the election campaign, the Prime Minister used to say, and he still says, that the Liberals' main priority was jobs, jobs, and jobs. I do hope that what he had in

mind was not to create jobs here in this House but, rather, in ridings across Canada, where people suffer from the current economic situation.

Again, this issue does not require urgent action. To delay the process for 24 months, as was originally proposed, does not, as far as we are concerned, jeopardize in any way the review process which will have to take place before the next election.

(1040)

In 24 months means early 1996, unless the Prime Minister, after deciding that he can no longer run the country, is anxious to yield to the Conservative leader and chooses to act quickly, which I think is unlikely, so we can expect an election to be held in the fall of 1997 or even in 1998, which leaves us enough time to readjust electoral boundaries.

Another point is that there is absolutely no reason why we should increase the number of members in this House. None at all. There is no objection to readjusting electoral boundaries to ensure that the voter population is more evenly distributed. But there is no justification at all for increasing the number of members in this House.

Clarity is of the essence. The government must send a clear signal to the public that its objective is not to create jobs here, at taxpayers' expense, but jobs out there for the unemployed who are waiting for answers from the government.

I also want to point out that the Electoral Boundaries Readjustment Commission has continued its work, which consists in conducting public hearings across the country to listen to what individuals and groups have to say about the proposed amendments. My point is that the Commission, despite the very clear message sent by the government when it tabled C-18 in this House, could not care less about the government's plans and that is why it has proceeded to conduct hearings across Canada, or at least in Quebec.

What impact will this have on the readjustment process? As soon as those concerned, including the municipal authorities in our electoral districts, realized that the government intended to postpone the electoral boundaries readjustment process for two years, people thought it was not worth appearing before the commission to make their presentations. They said to themselves: They will have to come back later, so we will go as soon as there is an official process duly approved by the government.

The commission simply ignored the government's plans. As the Solicitor General said a moment ago, the commission is a quasi-judicial body that can make decisions as it sees fit, and so it decided to go ahead anyway. As a result, in many locations, in the Eastern Townships for instance, only three groups appeared before the commission, while dozens of groups and municipalities would have done so if there had been a clearly established and clearly identified process.

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(1045)

The same happened in the Lower St. Lawrence district and other regions in Quebec, where many citizens and representatives of local authorities, especially municipalities, decided against appearing before the commission because they realized the process would be repeated in a year and a half or two years.

If we approve the amendments before the House, the commission's work will not be terminated but merely suspended for five or six months, after which, the Electoral Boundaries Readjustment Commission will resume its work. Does this mean that where public hearings were held, the commission will not go back to listen to members of the public and representatives of our municipalities? If so, there would be some justification for wondering whether the process is democratic.

That is why the commission, which was aware of the government's plans when the bill was tabled, should have stopped the process including the hearings, and waited until the government decided whether or not to extend the process. This is one more reason for repeating the entire process. Therefore, we should wait for the results regarding the criteria to be used by the commissions.

I said earlier, and other members also mentioned it, that the number of voters is one of the criteria, but there are others which should be taken into consideration. We should not forget the weight of regions within a province; we have to be careful not to strip regions of their representation because their young people, unable to find jobs in their area, had to move out, hopefully to a job in Montreal or maybe to join the ranks of those unemployed or on welfare in Montreal, Quebec City or elsewhere.

We have to devise criteria which do not jeopardize the future of these regions. We should take the time to think and to discuss the process, so as to be on solid ground when we finally launch the operation.

Second, when the readjustment process resumes, the government has to make sure that the commission's work is reviewed, and give private citizens and interest groups every opportunity to make their views known about the readjustments.

(1050)

For all these reasons, and in keeping with our stated views as Official Opposition, we would like to see the schedule which was in Bill C-18 adhered to, while assuring the House, and indeed the people of Quebec and Canada, that what we are seeking is a readjustment which will apply to the next federal elections to be held in 1997-1998 and which will be based on sound criteria.

Mr. Charest: Madam Speaker, I rise on a point of order. The speech by the member for Mégantic—Compton—Stanstead will not stand as a model of rigor.

In his speech, he mentioned something I must object to since I am directly concerned. He referred to the fact that I was not present in the House. There is no need to remind you of the very well known rule which prohibits a member from referring to the presence or the absence of another member. And I would add, if only the parliamentary secretary could keep quiet for a few seconds, that this remark is particularly obnoxious for the following reason: the Bloc did all it could to prevent the 11 independent members from speaking in the House. It is extremely hypocritical on its part to then rise in the House and claim that we were absent during the debate, when it did nothing at all to promote a fundamental element of democracy. After all, we represent more voters than it does.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Maheu): I am sorry for interrupting, but we were about to start a debate. I was aware of the comments by the hon. member for Mégantic—Compton—Stanstead. I believe it was a slip of the tongue and I shall ask him to withdraw.

Mr. Maurice Bernier (Mégantic—Compton—Stanstead): Madam Speaker, I am not sure whether this is a point of order or a question of privilege, or if the member for Sherbrooke was looking for an opportunity to speak in the House. I will concede that he is right in his application of the Standing Orders. I have no problem acknowledging it, but I will point out that, during the election campaign, the member for Sherbrooke was constantly denouncing the Bloc members' absence.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Maheu): Order! It is also a matter of debate. Resuming debate. The hon. member for Calgary West.

[English]

Mr. Stephen Harper (Calgary West): Madam Speaker, I am rising today to speak to Bill C-18, which suspends the operation of the electoral boundaries adjustment process and to address specifically the motion that the government has brought forward to accommodate amendments that have come from the Senate study of the bill.

[Translation]

The purpose of Bill C-18 is, I think, to kill the electoral boundaries readjustment process. The Reform Party was opposed to that bill until now. However, I can say that with the amendments proposed by the Senate and those put forward by the government today, we can now support this bill.

*S. O. 31**[English]*

As you know, Madam Speaker, we did oppose and have opposed vigorously Bill C-18. We were opposed to it to such an extent that at second reading closure was moved. We still have some concerns with this course of action, but I should begin by saying we can support this bill with the accommodations the government has made today.

(1055)

Let us review Bill C-18 and some of the original problems that have been addressed. The House will recall that originally there was no demand from the public for this legislation, certainly no mention in the red book of any intention to bring in such legislation and no serious mention of the procedural concerns that had arisen when legislation such as this had been introduced previously in 1973, 1985 and 1992. Yet in late March, early April, the government came out with C-18 as their top legislative priority.

When the bill was rammed through the House with closure, it really did not present a lot of opportunity for meaningful public debate. We had begun to hear, and the Senate later heard, from provincial and territorial governments, from many academics and experts and from many individual Canadians, particularly from British Columbia, all of whom were condemning C-18 as not simply a bad bill and not simply an undemocratic bill, but an unconstitutional bill.

It was apparent that the bill had been prepared without consultation with Elections Canada. Mr. Kingsley, the Chief Electoral Officer, has stated in committee hearings that it has always been the practice of the governments of the day to consult Elections Canada when considering changes to such processes and it is what we would have expected normally on this occasion.

The mechanics of our electoral system are admired around the world and Elections Canada's advice, as we know, is frequently sought by other countries. Recently we played a role in the elections in new democracies in both South Africa and Ukraine.

The electoral process and its outcome affect all Canadians. The interests of all of Canadians must be served, not the interests of politicians, not partisan interests or political self-interest.

One of the biggest problems with the original bill was the lack of all-party consensus. The government had only the support of the Bloc Québécois. It was opposed by the Reform Party, and I should add, opposed quite vigorously by the New Democratic Party and by the Progressive Conservative Party, although its opposition comes primarily from the Senate. We heard only within weeks of the passage of the bill that many elements of the Liberal Party were also opposed, as some members found out at their recent convention.

The reason I mention these other parties is that the support of parties, both major and minor, in this type of legislation is important for the operation of the democratic system. The support of the Bloc Québécois is a different matter and I will address that in my later remarks.

While all this has been going on, the public hearings into the redistribution process have continued. The bulk of the dollars had been spent even before the bill was introduced and now eight out of eleven of the commissions have finished their public hearings; in Prince Edward Island, Nova Scotia, New Brunswick—

The Speaker: You will be given time when we finish question period, but it being 11 a.m. pursuant to Standing Order 30(5), the House will now proceed to statements by members, pursuant to Standing Order 31.

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

*[English]***THE ENVIRONMENT**

Mr. John Loney (Edmonton North): Mr. Speaker, both the environment and the economy are big winners today as the result of two agreements between the federal and Alberta governments. The agreements are an example of federal and provincial governments working co-operatively to administer environmental regulations without sacrificing the quality of the environment or increasing the risk to human health.

The administrative and equivalency agreements are provided for under the Canadian Environmental Protection Act. They will lead to a more efficient delivery of the environmental protection and enforcement programs that govern toxic substances by reducing overlap and lightening the paper burden on jointly regulated industries.

This initiative is part of the federal government's overall plan to harmonize federal and provincial legislation and regulations where possible and eliminate unnecessary duplication.

* * *

*[Translation]***INTERNATIONAL CIVIL AVIATION ORGANIZATION**

Mr. Réal Ménard (Hochelaga—Maisonnette): Mr. Speaker, I wish to draw to the House's attention the 50th anniversary of the founding of the International Civil Aviation Organization, the only United Nations agency to be headquartered in Montreal since its founding in 1944. The ICAO has now become an important component of the worldwide transportation industry.

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In 1944, a total of 52 countries signed the convention on international civil aviation. The signing came at a time when 9 million people used airplanes as a mode of transportation. Today, airplanes carry nearly 1.2 billion passengers and are recognized as the safest means of transportation. We have the ICAO to thank in large part for this record because it had the foresight to invite member states to adopt efficient air safety measures.

The success of the ICAO clearly shows what the peoples of the world can accomplish when they work together. Many challenges await the ICAO in the next 50 years, and we wish this organization the best of luck.

* * *

[English]

BABY BOOMERS/YOUTH

Mr. Randy White (Fraser Valley West): Mr. Speaker, now that school is almost out, young people of this country are thinking more about their future. I thought it might be a good time to reflect on the difference between the younger generation and us baby boomers.

To boomers, McDonald's was a farmer with all the pets you could envision. To the younger generation, McDonald's means burgers and fries mc-ketchup to death.

To boomers, Mac the Knife was the number one song by Bobby Darrin. Today, Mac the Knife is one of countless young offenders.

The boomers have lived with the benefits of borrowed money. Today the younger generation lives with the results of borrowed money.

Yes, there are differences between the two generations. Will the future be better for the younger generation? It will depend on them, their determination, their creativity, their respect for the environment and their optimism.

Let us hope they have learned from our mistakes.

* * *

[Translation]

INFRASTRUCTURE PROGRAM

Mrs. Eleni Bakopanos (Saint-Denis): Mr. Speaker, this week in Montreal, the Liberal government followed through on an election promise to pave the way for Canada's future by announcing investments totalling \$80.8 million in projects in the city of Montreal. These projects represent phase one of the Canada-Quebec infrastructure program aimed at the refurbishment and construction of municipal infrastructures.

[English]

My riding of Saint-Denis will receive \$15.53 million, creating over 240 jobs. The federal Liberal government's infrastructure initiative will boost the economy of Saint-Denis, it will boost the economy of Quebec and it will boost the economy of Canada.

[Translation]

This is another example of co-operation between the governments of Quebec and Canada which deserves to be applauded!

* * *

[English]

ENVIRONMENTAL WEEK

Mr. Bob Speller (Haldimand—Norfolk): Mr. Speaker, June 5 to 11 is Environmental Week. On the occasion of Environmental Week I extend an invitation to all hon. members and to all Canadians to be good environmental citizens and to take part in this week's activities.

As a result of numerous activities and exhibitions being held nation-wide, Canadians will have the opportunity to familiarize themselves with healthy environmental practices.

We as parliamentarians have a great responsibility not only to Canadians and our immediate neighbours but to the whole world to promote environmentally responsible policies and to make sure that the laws that we pass in this House are sustainable.

The Canadian public also has a responsibility because the laws and the regulations we pass both here and in our provincial legislatures will not work unless there is public involvement.

Environmental Week re-emphasizes the importance of public participation.

The theme of this year's Environmental Week is "This Week Every Week" or en français, "cette semaine et toute l'année" should be underlined. Environmental Week is a fun week and I encourage all members—

The Speaker: Order, please.

* * *

(1105)

D-DAY

Mr. Harold Culbert (Carleton—Charlotte): Mr. Speaker, in remembrance of D-Day and the events leading to the end of the second world war, the Canada Remembrance Program was initiated to encourage events commemorating those who fought and died on land, at sea and in the air so that we as Canadians might enjoy our freedoms that we know today.

This program recognizes the values and strengths that helped Canadians deal successfully with the challenges faced during the second world war, the same values and strengths that make Canada and Canadians respected throughout the world today.

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This Saturday hundreds of veterans from New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, Prince Edward Island, Quebec and Ontario will gather in Hartland, New Brunswick to commemorate the 50th anniversary of D-Day and Canadian troops who landed in Normandy on June 6, 1944.

I am sure that this House will join with me in extending our sincere thanks to Hartland, New Brunswick Branch 24 of the Royal Canadian Legion for their commemorative ceremony and to all veterans for the freedom we enjoy today.

* * *

[Translation]

CANADIAN ECONOMY

Mr. Richard Bélisle (La Prairie): Mr. Speaker, the prestigious bond rating agency known as Moody's has lowered Canada's foreign currency debt credit rating. Responding to the lowering of the rating, the Minister of Finance stated that the fundamental components of the Canadian economy are sound.

How can the Minister of Finance say that everything is fine when structural unemployment in Canada remains extremely high, when according to the OECD, the debt ratio of the Canadian public sector as a percentage of GDP increased by 82 per cent between 1985 and 1993, contrary to the average increase of only 21 per cent for all OECD countries?

It is not the current political situation in Quebec that is responsible for the repeated moves to lower the federal government's credit rating, but rather the sorry state of the federal government's finances, a situation which will not be resolved by the Liberal budget and one which has foreign investors worried.

* * *

[English]

RADIO STATIONS

Mr. Ray Speaker (Lethbridge): Mr. Speaker, private radio stations in my riding and indeed across Canada are worried for their very survival. This industry has lost more than \$100 million during the last three years. Today radio stations are facing another threat, a potential change in government policy.

The Department of Canadian Heritage is studying "Neighbouring Rights" which would extend the current music copyrights. If this is done, radio stations will have to pay royalties to producers and performing artists whenever they play a song on the radio.

Such an amendment would cost radio stations across Canada \$22 million. Since Canada is a net importer of music, most of the royalties will flow across the Canadian border into the pockets

of already wealthy music producers and artists. The struggling Canadian musician will see very little benefit.

The policy could also shut down local radio stations if enacted. It will undoubtedly result in the loss of jobs.

* * *

TIANANMENS SQUARE

Mr. Svend J. Robinson (Burnaby—Kingsway): Mr. Speaker, tomorrow marks the fifth anniversary of the brutal killings of hundreds of innocent students and workers in Tiananmen Square in Beijing, China.

Let us pay tribute today to the memories and courage of those brave men and women who struggled for human rights and democracy in China and continue to do so today.

Tragically, grave violations of human rights continue in China as documented just this week by Amnesty International. Suppression of the rights of labour, denial of political and religious freedom, torture and widespread capital punishment are all continuing in China.

As well, China continues to ruthlessly suppress the human rights and religious freedoms of the people of Tibet and to supply arms to bloody military regimes such as Burma.

Finally, our government must be just as vigorous and publicly outspoken in defence of the human rights of the people of China and Tibet as they are in pursuit of corporate profits and trade.

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CANADIAN FORCES

Mr. John Richardson (Perth—Wellington—Waterloo): Mr. Speaker, it is my pleasure today to draw attention, as did others, to the weekend that allows all Canadians to remember and thank those brave and valiant Canadian servicemen who participated in the D-Day landing which led to a quick victory in northwest Europe.

I sincerely wish all those Canadians who are participating in these commemorative affairs excellent support from all other Canadians.

I would also like to bring the attention of this House and Canadians to another group of Canadians who are serving their country as part of the United Nations protection force in the former Yugoslavia. These soldiers were observed to have the highest standards of training, patience, diligence and ability to negotiate without bringing arms to bear in the situation. Some of these situations are very trying and some of them are very unnerving. Our sailors, our soldiers and airmen who are serving in Yugoslavia are carrying on the great tradition of patience, forbearance and commitment to duty for this country in the world.

(1110)

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION WEEK

Mr. Ian Murray (Lanark—Carleton): Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to announce to the House that today is National Transportation Day in Canada.

Today in Thunder Bay there will be inaugural celebrations for National Transportation Week which runs from June 5 to 11. A wide range of transport related ceremonies, activities and seminars have been planned for major cities from coast to coast.

The theme of National Transportation Week 1994 is "Intermodalism: The Perfect Fit". Intermodalism, which describes the use of two or more modes of transportation in a continuous operation under a single bill of lading, is increasing in this country. This mode of transport is particularly evident in our import-export trade which counts on computer applications and streamlined procedures to get goods to market quickly and at the best possible prices.

Transportation is the life support system for our economy and it is critically important to our ability to compete internationally in the ever evolving global marketplace.

I am very pleased therefore to salute the many men and women who keep our transportation systems running as they should year round.

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NORTHERN LIVING ALLOWANCE

Mrs. Marlene Cowling (Dauphin—Swan River): Mr. Speaker, I stand before you today to address the reduction of the northern living allowance. The towns listed in appendix C of the Revenue Canada income tax guide are to endure a gradual reduction of the amounts with total elimination by 1995.

For the Canadians who live in these towns, and specifically my constituents of Dauphin—Swan River, this deduction is not one of convenience but a means of compensating for the burden of having to travel up to 300 kilometres to seek medical attention.

All Canadians are entitled to equal access to health care and government services. Geography and standard of living create barriers to such services. With the emphasis of the Canadian economy focused upon urban centres dotting the 49th parallel it would seem that we are penalizing those who inhabit our northern and rural regions. Large corporations offer their employees isolation pay in order to entice transfer to these locations.

I implore the hon. Minister of Finance within his mandate of fiscal responsibility and reduced spending to explore other

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avenues of revenue generation other than eliminating the northern living allowance for those towns listed in appendix C.

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*[Translation]***FRANCOPHONES IN CANADA**

Mr. Gaston Péloquin (Brome—Missisquoi): Mr. Speaker, the Bloc Québécois members are pleased to see that their policy regarding francophones in Canada was well received.

As noted in *La Presse* today, the Leader of the Opposition is indeed a man who has served the cause of francophones well, with more yet to come.

The ACFO president made himself very clear on that subject, stating there had never been a clearer and more concrete and specific commitment to francophones outside Quebec and that over the past eight months, the Bloc Québécois had risen more often to speak for francophone communities than the Liberals had during the entire Conservative mandate.

We, Bloc Québécois members, will not stop asking questions until such time as the government takes a stand for equity and respect for the rights of francophones in this country.

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*[English]***ROYAL CANADIAN LEGION**

Mr. Stephen Harper (Calgary West): Mr. Speaker, this week the Royal Canadian Legion has been holding its convention in my city of Calgary.

We have all become aware of this due to the media concentration on the issue of head-dress regulations that arose at the convention. I probably would have voted on that particular issue differently than the legion, but frankly that is not the important issue.

What we should be focusing on is the focus of the convention; the 50th anniversary of the D-Day invasion and the unparalleled historic contribution of Canadian veterans to our society through their bravery in those dark days of World War II.

The greatest human rights victory of this century, perhaps of history, was the defeat of Adolf Hitler and the allies of the national socialists. The unbalanced focus of the press and so-called human rights commentaries this week have been quite frankly pathetic and an insult to veterans and veterans' organizations.

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GELAS GALLANT

Mr. Wayne Easter (Malpeque): Mr. Speaker, I would like to take this opportunity to congratulate Mr. Gelas Gallant of

Oral Questions

Rustico, Prince Edward Island, on being awarded the Acadian Order of Merit by the Societe Saint-Thomas-D'Aquin. This prestigious award is presented annually to a person who has contributed significantly toward advancing the Acadian culture on Prince Edward Island.

(1115)

Mr. Gallant has earned this award through his lifelong dedication and involvement in the Acadian community. He is the eighth generation descendant of Michel Haché-Gallant who was the first Acadian to arrive on Prince Edward Island.

Mr. Gallant and his wife Marguerite have 15 children, all of whom have been educated in French and the rich Acadian culture. In fact most of those children live in the community.

Mr. Gallant has been active in farm organizations and still is politically active. When he calls, you listen.

Mr. Gallant is a citizen who best exemplifies Canadianism through his rich involvement in advancing Acadian culture, thus improving the local community and ultimately Canada as a rich multicultural country.

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*[Translation]***FRANCOPHONES OUTSIDE QUEBEC**

Mr. Don Boudria (Glengarry—Prescott—Russell): Mr. Speaker, which is the real position of the Bloc Quebecois concerning francophones outside Quebec?

Last week, the Bloc leader stated: "We recognize the existence of a francophone space within Canada, Quebec being the anchor point of this space". What an astonishing discovery really about a nation which has been around for three centuries!

Let us remember however the other face the Bloc Quebecois showed during the election campaign when the Prime Minister's legitimacy was put into question because he dared to represent an Acadian community.

[English]

Let us also remember the following immortal words: "Bilingualism is only an issue in Quebec. People in Manitoba and in Ontario do not really worry about speaking French, they just speak English". This is a quote of a Bloc Quebecois MP from the *Hill Times*, November 25, 1993.

[Translation]

Why is the face shown to Quebecers different from the one shown to francophones minorities? Could it be that the Bloc Quebecois is two-faced?

ORAL QUESTION PERIOD*[Translation]***COLLÈGE MILITAIRE ROYAL IN SAINT-JEAN**

Mr. Michel Gauthier (Roberval): Mr. Speaker, in a report to Quebec's Minister of Education, the advisory committee on the military college in Saint-Jean, chaired by former senator Claude Castonguay, concludes that closing this college is an irreparable mistake. The committee reluctantly proposes that the college be converted into a college and university-level educational institution focusing on international subjects.

Does the Deputy Prime Minister agree with the Castonguay Committee's conclusion that closing this college is an irreparable mistake?

Hon. Sheila Copps (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of the Environment): Absolutely not, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Michel Gauthier (Roberval): Mr. Speaker, does the Deputy Prime Minister admit that the money that will be saved by closing the college can only be minimal, compared to the negative effects of the closure and given that the operating costs of the college in Saint-Jean—I hope the Deputy Prime Minister knows this—are much lower than those of the college in Kingston?

Hon. Sheila Copps (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of the Environment): Mr. Speaker, I think the question that must be asked, and that we asked ourselves, is this: Why, if the Collège Militaire Royal is so essential, did 83 per cent of military-educated francophones attend other institutions?

Mr. Michel Gauthier (Roberval): Mr. Speaker, does the Deputy Prime Minister not admit that, as the committee's report states, "the closure of the military college in Saint-Jean would mean the loss of the only college that is and can be truly bilingual"?

Hon. Sheila Copps (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of the Environment): Mr. Speaker, my sister-in-law from Ontario studied in French. She completed her medical studies as a member of the military at the University of Ottawa.

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CONSTRUCTION OF A FRENCH-LANGUAGE SCHOOL IN KINGSTON

Mrs. Suzanne Tremblay (Rimouski—Témiscouata): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of the Environment.

Monday, in the House, the Deputy Prime Minister endorsed the opposition expressed by Kingston city council to the construction of a suitable French-language school, saying it was

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justified because, and I quote: "The proposed site was only steps away from a dangerous toxic waste treatment site".

(1120)

Does the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of the Environment still maintain that Kingston's opposition to the proposed French school is justified because the site already purchased by the school board is allegedly next to a site that handles toxic and hazardous wastes, when such a site does not exist? Does she still maintain that, yes or no?

Hon. Sheila Copps (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of the Environment): Mr. Speaker, yes, and I even have a letter signed by Mr. John Morand, chief administrator of the City of Kingston, who indeed confirms that a toxic waste site is right next to it.

Mrs. Suzanne Tremblay (Rimouski—Témiscouata): Mr. Speaker, in that case, how does the Deputy Prime Minister reconcile her statement supporting Kingston's obstruction, when her colleague, the heritage minister, gave a grant of over half a million dollars for the proposed francophone community cultural centre located on the very site condemned by the environment minister?

Hon. Sheila Copps (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of the Environment): Mr. Speaker, I think it is unfortunate that the Bloc does not accept the truth. The fact of the matter is that the hazardous waste site lies beside the one bought by the school board.

I would not like my daughter to go to school 1,000 feet from a site that is not only full of hazardous waste but also full of gas. It is a fire hazard.

The most important question, which the Prime Minister answered last week, was: Does Kingston want a French-language school? The answer is yes, and we want to have it as soon as possible.

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[English]

DYNAMIC MAINTENANCE LTD.

Mr. Ed Harper (Simcoe Centre): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Deputy Prime Minister.

Yesterday I raised some very serious matters relating to the parliamentary secretary for fisheries. As of May 24, 1994, the parliamentary secretary was still listed as an officer of Dynamic Maintenance, a position from which he says he resigned on December 1, 1993.

The parliamentary secretary's father and father-in-law are also listed as officers and directors of Dynamic Maintenance, a situation which would hardly qualify as an arm's length relationship.

Is the Deputy Prime Minister aware of these facts and if so, how can she explain this apparent violation of the conflict code?

Hon. David Dingwall (Minister of Public Works and Government Services and Minister for the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency): Mr. Speaker, I wish to inform my hon. colleague that the contract in question was consummated before the election. Eight bidders were involved in the process and it was whittled down to four. The successful bidder in this particular incident saved the taxpayers of Canada, which I assume is the goal of the hon. member, approximately \$3.4 million.

The Deputy Registrar General of Canada has provided an opinion which clearly states that no conflict of interest exists in this particular instance.

Mr. Ed Harper (Simcoe Centre): Mr. Speaker, we have spoken to the B.C. ministry of finance and corporate relations and we were informed that until a person is delisted they remain an officer of the company. They also informed us that the records are up to date.

There are some very serious discrepancies which I think must be looked into.

Will the Deputy Prime Minister support a motion to refer this matter to the procedures and House affairs committee?

Hon. David Dingwall (Minister of Public Works and Government Services and Minister for the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency): Mr. Speaker, to the last part of the hon. member's question, the answer is no.

I find it rather insulting that the hon. member would stand in his place and question the integrity of the Deputy Registrar General who has given an opinion based upon the facts which have been provided to him that no conflict whatsoever exists in this particular case.

If the hon. member wishes to pursue it further, why does he not raise those substantive questions with the Deputy Registrar General?

Mr. Ed Harper (Simcoe Centre): Mr. Speaker, I would like to quote the current Minister of Fisheries and Oceans from *Hansard* on April 30, 1986 where this comment was made in relation to the Sinclair Stevens affair: "How blind can a trust be when a spouse is managing it? How many other members of cabinet have a blind trust being managed by their spouses?"

(1125)

It is not much of a leap from spouse to parent, particularly when they share the same House. Can the Deputy Prime Minister explain if, under the Liberal version of ethics, a parent living in the same home qualifies as an arm's length relationship?

Hon. David Dingwall (Minister of Public Works and Government Services and Minister for the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency): Mr. Speaker, if the hon. member has a substantive allegation to make, he should make it. Not only should he make it clearly and unequivocally in this House, but he should also go outside and make that charge in the national media. If he is not prepared to do that and if he is not prepared to consult with the Deputy Registrar General, then I suggest the

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hon. member ought to exercise prudence as opposed to irresponsibility.

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[*Translation*]

PRIVATE MEETINGS

Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Deputy Prime Minister. In response to a Canadian Press release, which did not accurately report comments claimed to have been made by the Leader of the Opposition at a private meeting with members of the Canadian Chamber of Commerce, the Deputy Prime Minister said that it was shameful for the opposition leader to hold secret meetings with small groups.

To be consistent, will the Deputy Prime Minister condemn the in camera meeting her Prime Minister held this week with a small Toronto Club group to discuss the government's economic policy?

Some hon. members: Oh, oh.

The Speaker: Order! I am not sure that the hon. members want to ask or answer questions on events taking place outside the House and which, in my opinion, have nothing to do with the administrative work of the government. However, if the Deputy Prime Minister wants to answer the question, she may do so.

Hon. Sheila Copps (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of the Environment): Mr. Speaker, I said that it was shameful on the part of the Leader of the Opposition to hold private meetings on a secret agenda that he has not even discussed with his own caucus.

Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie): Mr. Speaker, I see that the Deputy Prime Minister has a gift for—

An hon. member: Clairvoyance!

Mr. Duceppe: —clairvoyance. She sees and hears through walls.

Since the hon. member is advising the Leader of the Opposition to avoid meeting privately with small groups to discuss secret agenda, will she confirm that the Prime Minister of Canada did indeed have private discussions with a small group on issues which no one here knows, unless it is the hon. member, if she has a gift for clairvoyance? If she is in the know, she should tell us what the Prime Minister said during his private meeting with the small Toronto Club group!

[*English*]

Hon. Sheila Copps (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of the Environment): Mr. Speaker, the difference between the Prime Minister and the Leader of the Opposition is that the

Prime Minister says the same thing in every part of the country regardless of whether the meeting is private or public. I am sure the member himself, when his leader promised he was going to resign the day after the referendum, would have wished to have been consulted on the secret agenda of his own leader.

The Speaker: Colleagues, I would urge you to keep questions in the administrative realm of government as opposed to what was in the newspapers or what was supposed to have been said. I ask all hon. members to please respect the procedures of the House in this regard. I go to the hon. member for Saanich—Gulf Islands.

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MEMORIAL SITES

Mr. Jack Frazer (Saanich—Gulf Islands): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Canadian Heritage.

Over the next few days, millions of Canadians will pause to pay tribute to the men and women who have given their lives to defend our freedom.

Today, the Queen and the Prime Minister dedicated a new memorial in London to these Canadian veterans. In a related matter, a memorial to the 10,000 Canadians who served in the U.S. Army during the Vietnam war was recently given to Canada by the Michigan Association of Concerned Veterans. For several months, veterans have been seeking a suitable site on which to locate this memorial.

(1130)

Can the Minister of Canadian Heritage explain why he, and the National Capital Commission, have yet to provide a site for this memorial to Canadian Vietnam veterans?

Hon. Michel Dupuy (Minister of Canadian Heritage): Mr. Speaker, naturally the decision to offer space in the capital region is to be taken by the National Capital Commission.

The minister owns no land. It belongs to the National Capital Commission. The National Capital Commission follows regulations and directives which have been followed for years. The regulations and the directives concerning the celebration of events of national significance do not seem to cover the situation which our colleague has raised, that is, the honouring of Canadians who served in a foreign army.

Mr. Jack Frazer (Saanich—Gulf Islands): Mr. Speaker, a Canadian monument to Americans who served in the Canadian forces during both world wars and Korea, stands in the Arlington National Cemetery in Washington, D.C.

The purpose of both the monument in Washington and the recently received American gift to Canada is to recognize individuals who were prepared to fight for what they believed in. This is not a partisan nor a controversial issue.

Oral Questions

Will the minister take the opportunity of this anniversary to announce that the memorial will be erected?

[English]

Hon. Michel Dupuy (Minister of Canadian Heritage): Mr. Speaker, I am being asked to act in total disregard of the policies and directives respected by the National Capital Commission. We have our own way of celebrating. The Americans may have other ways, but we are going to respect Canadian ways.

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[Translation]

ARMS SMUGGLING

Mr. René Laurin (Joliette): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Solicitor General. Yesterday, the Solicitor General denied the existence of a secret briefing note based on a RCMP report concerning arms smuggling in Kanawake, and I quote: "Further to my inquiries, my department insists that it has no knowledge whatsoever of the existence of such a briefing note".

Will the Solicitor General keep denying the existence of a memorandum from his department about arms being smuggled into the country on CP trains and does he expect the RCMP to investigate this matter since, contrary to what CP officials have stated, we saw pictures last night of detached freight cars from a train returning from the United States that were left unattended inside the Kanawake reserve?

Hon. Herb Gray (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Solicitor General of Canada): Mr. Speaker, if the hon. member can confirm that these freight cars contained firearms, I hope he will pass this information on to the RCMP. Again, the secretariat in my department insists that it has no knowledge whatsoever of such a briefing note, but it is up to the RCMP to enforce the law throughout the country, including the Kanawake reserve.

Mr. René Laurin (Joliette): Mr. Speaker, how can the Solicitor General ignore such serious allegations when his own colleague from Glengarry—Prescott—Russell has allegedly warned Customs officials about weapons being smuggled by train?

Hon. Herb Gray (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Solicitor General of Canada): Mr. Speaker, I have discussed the situation with my colleague and I am aware of the information he has received from one of his constituents. This information has been passed on to Customs and the RCMP which are responsible for appropriately investigating this matter.

THE ECONOMY

Mr. Jim Silye (Calgary Centre): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Finance. Yesterday the minister expressed disappointment at Canada losing its last AAA foreign currency debt rating. Disappointment is not enough for bond rating agencies or the Canadian public. It is clear that investors do not believe that current fiscal measures are sufficient to allay their concerns about Canada's debt crisis.

(1135)

Besides promises to meet deficit targets, what new action is the minister going to take to ensure that no further erosion of our credit rating takes place?

Hon. Paul Martin (Minister of Finance and Minister responsible for the Federal Office of Regional Development—Quebec): Mr. Speaker, yes, we were disappointed by Moody's action. On the other hand the House will understand that Moody's had signalled some months ago that it intended to review our foreign pay debt.

The member will also recognize that we are dealing with only 2 per cent of our debt, the extent which is foreign pay and that they confirmed the AAA rating that Canada enjoys on its domestic currency debt.

Furthermore, Moody's clearly recognized that the government had taken very clear action in terms of deficit reduction. I would assure the hon. member and the financial community that we intend to hit our deficit targets.

Mr. Jim Silye (Calgary Centre): Mr. Speaker, I specifically asked what new action and I got a repeat of the same line we heard before.

The four main rating agencies are sending smoke signals to the government warning about the danger of inaction on the deficit. Will the finance minister do something to reduce federal spending before these smoke signals erupt into a full-fledged fire?

Hon. Paul Martin (Minister of Finance and Minister responsible for the Federal Office of Regional Development—Quebec): Mr. Speaker, the member refers to the four rating agencies. He will know that the actions taken by the other rating agencies were taken some time ago before the election. Moody's has simply brought our foreign pay debt down to the levels of the others.

It does not mean this is an acceptable situation. We laid out very clearly in our budget that we were going to hit our interim target of 3 per cent within three years, that our ultimate goal was to eliminate the deficit. Since then the Prime Minister has on many occasions confirmed our intention to do so.

Oral Questions

We said in the House that we will take whatever action is required to hit our targets and I can confirm that again.

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[Translation]

INDIAN AFFAIRS

Mr. André Caron (Jonquière): Mr. Speaker, yesterday, Raymond Gabriel, a Kanesatake Mohawk leader who values traditional ways, warned the government not to make any further financial concession to the Kanesatake band council. Reminding the government of the \$700,000 deficit accumulated by the band council, Mr. Gabriel asked the federal negotiator to review the operations and the management of the band council since Jerry Peltier was elected chief.

My question is for the Deputy Prime Minister. Before resuming negotiations with chief Jerry Peltier, can she tell us if the government has concluded the inquiry announced by the Minister of Indian Affairs into allegations, by Mohawks in Kanesatake, of misappropriation of public funds by Jerry Peltier?

Hon. Sheila Copps (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of the Environment): Mr. Speaker, I believe that the Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development answered that question yesterday. We have appointed a negotiator and created a climate more favourable to negotiations. Negotiations are going smoothly so far. We cannot negotiate and, at the same time, make statements in the House regarding the negotiations.

Mr. André Caron (Jonquière): Mr. Speaker, how can the Deputy Prime Minister justify her government's decision to resume negotiations with Jerry Peltier, if the inquiry into alleged misappropriation of public funds has not been completed?

[English]

Hon. Sheila Copps (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of the Environment): Mr. Speaker, the statements of the Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development were very clear yesterday. We have appointed a negotiator and the negotiations are going quite well. I am sure that is a big disappointment to the Bloc members who would like to see the whole thing go up in flames.

The reality is the negotiations are ongoing and we are not going to negotiate here on the floor of the House of Commons.

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INFRASTRUCTURE PROGRAM

Mr. Gordon Kirkby (Prince Albert—Churchill River): Mr. Speaker, I have a question for the minister in charge of the infrastructure program.

During the last election campaign the Liberal Party promised that job creation would be its number one priority. An important part of this job creation initiative was the announcement of the \$6 billion national infrastructure program.

(1140)

Could the minister inform the House of the number of jobs that have been created by this program and the number of specific projects approved.

Hon. Arthur C. Eggleton (President of the Treasury Board and Minister responsible for Infrastructure): Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for giving me the opportunity to bring more good news to the House. After all, what is more important than getting Canadians back to work and that is what this program is all about.

To this point in time we have approved over 1,000 projects, worth \$1.3 billion. We have got 20,000 Canadians back to work, with another almost 6,000 projects in the pipeline. By the end of this month we expect to have the allocations to the halfway mark.

Already I have municipalities and provinces asking if they can get more money. This program is working. It is getting Canadians jobs.

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WRITERS' UNION OF CANADA

Mrs. Jan Brown (Calgary Southeast): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Canadian Heritage.

Between June 30 and July 3 Vancouver will be hosting the Writers' Union of Canada conference "Writing through Race" which is receiving \$10,000 from the federal government, as a matter of fact from the Canada Council.

Recently this conference has come under widespread criticism because participation will be restricted on the basis of race. Even the founder of the union and its former chairman, Pierre Berton, has argued the union should not support something "which excludes any people because of the colour of their skin".

Can the minister tell Canadians if it is the policy of the government to support organizations and conferences which discriminate on the basis of race?

Hon. Michel Dupuy (Minister of Canadian Heritage): Mr. Speaker, this question draws an obvious answer. The minister of heritage is also the minister of multiculturalism and therefore profoundly against discrimination in all circumstances.

Mrs. Jan Brown (Calgary Southeast): Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to hear that answer because yesterday the Minister of National Defence said he would refuse to enter Canadian Legions because they are discriminating against the Sikh and Jewish communities.

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Ironically, if the Minister of National Defence attended the "Writing through Race" conference he would be refused entry to certain workshops on the basis of his race. This conference is demonstrating racial discrimination and it is clearly wrong.

Will the minister immediately withdraw federal funding from this conference, given what he just stated, and demand that the writers' union no longer practise discrimination of this sort.

Hon. Michel Dupuy (Minister of Canadian Heritage): Mr. Speaker, I would wish to have the facts first and to see exactly what the circumstances are in which the conference would exclude people on the basis of race. I would not accept it.

However if there are certain groups which wish to meet together to discuss particular issues I would understand it. But the principle of discrimination in a conference is something which I do not accept.

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[Translation]

JUSTICE

Mr. Antoine Dubé (Lévis): Mr. Speaker, having read the bill on young offenders introduced by the government, the Quebec minister of justice expressed his disappointment and serious concerns about the amendments to the act proposed by his federal counterpart. He said that Quebec would have preferred the status quo.

My question is for the Deputy Prime Minister. Should we assume that before introducing its bill the federal government deliberately elected to disregard Quebec's recommendations?

Hon. Herb Gray (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Solicitor General of Canada): Mr. Speaker, I can guarantee that the minister has considered the points of view of his provincial counterparts. I am also convinced that these various points of view will be considered during the debate on this major bill.

(1145)

Mr. Antoine Dubé (Lévis): Mr. Speaker, could the Deputy Prime Minister or the Solicitor General tell us why the government did not consider the recommendations made by Quebec, since the Quebec minister of justice said yesterday: "The law, as it is, is perfectly adequate"?

Hon. Herb Gray (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Solicitor General of Canada): Mr. Speaker, we answered the concerns of Canadians everywhere in the country. They expressed the desire for more secure homes and streets. This is also a commitment we made in the red book, and I believe we have the support of a majority of Canadians.

[English]

SEXUAL OFFENDERS

Ms. Val Meredith (Surrey—White Rock—South Langley): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Solicitor General.

On Monday, in response to a question about the release of Larry Fisher, the Minister of Justice stated that he had identified the matter as one requiring action. However he went on to say that he was talking to the provinces about having them amend the Mental Health Act to permit assessment if necessary for continued confinement.

Does the minister not believe that since these individuals are incarcerated for committing violent crimes they should be treated as criminals and not mental health patients?

Hon. Herb Gray (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Solicitor General of Canada): Mr. Speaker, the law at present does not permit the detention of prisoners beyond the sentence imposed by the courts.

We recognize there are prisoners whose situation is such that they may continue to provide a serious risk to the public after the end of the sentence imposed by the courts. We are examining with the provinces how we can deal with that situation in a way that is consistent with the Constitution of Canada and will be upheld by the courts.

We are proceeding through a federal-provincial task force which is expected to report shortly. On the basis of that report we will formulate proposals which will be discussed in the House.

I look forward to the discussion leading to a response with which we will deal with the kinds of concerns we have expressed and which have been expressed on the other side of the House as well.

Ms. Val Meredith (Surrey—White Rock—South Langley): Mr. Speaker, last year the Parole Board detained 200 prisoners because they were too great a risk to let out. Some of these violent prisoners will complete their sentences and once again be out on our streets.

My private member's bill before the House would prevent these dangerous offenders from unsupervised release into our communities.

Is the House not the place where laws should be amended to address the problem of violent offenders that threaten our citizens?

Hon. Herb Gray (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Solicitor General of Canada): Mr. Speaker, we are dealing with a situation which involves both federal and provincial jurisdictions under our Constitution. While the Constitution says that criminal law is something that is dealt with in the House of Commons and the Senate of Canada, the

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administration of justice according to the Constitution is a provincial responsibility.

Therefore, in order to deal seriously with the problem and go beyond mere words and into the field of meaningful action, we need a co-operative effort involving both the federal government and the provinces. That co-operative effort will, I am sure, involve legislation that will be dealt with in the House leading, as I have said, to action rather than words.

That is what Canadians want and that is what they are going to get: not just words but real action.

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IMMIGRATION

Mr. Gurbax Singh Malhi (Bramalea—Gore—Malton): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration.

Yesterday the minister released a report on business immigration. Could the minister advise the House what benefit initiative the minister has proposed for business immigration to Canada?

Hon. Sergio Marchi (Minister of Citizenship and Immigration): Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for his question. It is true that yesterday the government tabled a report it had commissioned on a non-remunerated basis by a practitioner in the field, Mr. Mendel Green.

The report will certainly lead the way in terms of a review of how we can strengthen what has generally been a very successful program. In the last seven years some \$2.5 billion of investment has been attracted, creating an estimated 30,000 jobs.

(1150)

The attempt is to try to strengthen the success stories and to try to correct some areas of concern namely in the investor category. Since 1993 amendments put through the House have improved that. We should continue to find ways of strengthening our mechanisms and our monitoring to ensure that those who do invest and want to create jobs and create economic wealth do so and, second, to keep it in context.

This year it represents approximately 10 per cent of overall immigration, which I think is just about right because we do not want to leave the suggestion that only those with deep pockets can come to this country.

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[*Translation*]

IRVING WHALE

Mr. Roger Pomerleau (Anjou—Rivière-des-Prairies): Mr. Speaker, my question is directed to the Minister of the Environment. It seems the government is preparing to refloat the wreck of the *Irving Whale*, which contains more than 3,000 tons of oil, off the coast of the Magdalen Islands. Apparently, the decision was made although studies have shown that the pumping option is much safer than refloating.

Are we to understand that to save \$14 million, the government is prepared to take considerable risks that may affect the fisheries and the local tourism industry, by opting for refloating which is less costly but not as safe as pumping?

Hon. Sheila Copps (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of the Environment): Certainly not, Mr. Speaker. The hon. member ought to know that as the minister responsible, I tabled three reports in the House which looked at the best way to deal with the *Irving Whale*. The third option, the one we chose, is not only less costly but also safer, which was confirmed by scientists with the Coast Guard and the Department of the Environment.

Mr. Roger Pomerleau (Anjou—Rivière-des-Prairies): Mr. Speaker, on a supplementary. Could the minister indicate who will pay the cost of dealing with the problem of the *Irving Whale*? The taxpayers, the oil companies' compensation fund or Irving, the company responsible for this time bomb?

Hon. Sheila Copps (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of the Environment): Mr. Speaker, as I said on the day we announced that we had accomplished something while his leader did nothing at all for three years, after 1,000 days we at least had something to show for it. We have advanced federal funds, and we intend to recover the full amount from a fund to which all ship owners, including those of the *Irving Whale*, contribute.

* * *

[*English*]

GRAIN TRANSPORTATION

Mr. Leon E. Benoit (Vegreville): Mr. Speaker, in recognition of National Transportation Day I would like to address the issue of grain transportation. My question is for the Minister of Transport.

Payments to farmers under the WGTA have been reduced by about \$100 million a year. At the same time nothing has been done to make the system more efficient by allowing farmers increased access to alternate shipping modes for grain.

When will the minister put this money in farmers' hands and allow them to choose the best market for their grain without this distortion?

Oral Questions

Hon. Ralph E. Goodale (Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food): Mr. Speaker, the issues to which the hon. member is referring are under active examination at the present time.

As he will know, the previous government had established a consultative and advisory process, including an examination of transportation efficiencies or inefficiencies which was conducted by the Grain Transportation Agency and a study being conducted by an independent organization known as the Producer Payment Panel to examine the possibility of different methods of payment of the Crow benefit under the Western Grain Transportation Act.

My colleague, the Minister of Transport, and I have received a copy of the efficiency study conducted by the Grain Transportation Agency. We are awaiting the final report of the Producer Payment Panel with respect to alternate methods of payment.

We have indicated that while those processes were started by a previous government, and therefore we are not necessarily bound by the outcome of those various studies and recommendations, we will obviously be interested to see what those studies produce. We will consider that input together with the very valuable input of a number of others that have an interest in this situation, most especially western farmers, as we arrive at a decision in respect of the matter in the coming months.

Mr. Leon E. Benoit (Vegreville): Mr. Speaker, this issue has been studied to death for more than 25 years. If all the money that was spent on studies was put into a safety net program, I suggest there would be no need for any further spending on agriculture.

(1155)

Will the minister stop studying and start acting on this important transportation issue?

Hon. Ralph E. Goodale (Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food): Mr. Speaker, the government has indicated that this issue is very high on its agenda for action in the coming months.

In addition to some of the issues referred to by the hon. gentleman in his question, we also have some important considerations to take into account with respect to the impact of the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade, especially the new GATT which is to come into effect in 1995. That is a most recent matter that comes to bear on the situation with some very direct consequences that we have to take into account.

The hon. member may rest assured that he and his colleagues, and most especially farmers across western Canada, will see a very vigorous, active agenda on the subject in the time between now and this time next year.

ABORIGINAL VETERANS

Mr. Len Taylor (The Battlefords—Meadow Lake): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Deputy Prime Minister.

Today in London the Prime Minister and about 300 Canadian veterans are participating in the unveiling of a very special commemorative memorial. This weekend all across Canada special celebrations in honour of the 50th anniversary of D-Day are taking place. We remember that many veterans who served Canada and the world were aboriginal veterans from Canada.

As we celebrate this commemoration of the 50th anniversary of D-Day, is the government prepared to take steps to address some of the grievances that have been held over these 50 years by aboriginal veterans?

Hon. Lawrence MacAulay (Secretary of State (Veterans)): Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for his question.

I remind my hon. colleague that aboriginal veterans have the same rights under veterans legislation as any other veterans in the country.

Mr. Len Taylor (The Battlefords—Meadow Lake): Mr. Speaker, I have a supplementary question for the Secretary of State for Veterans Affairs.

As the minister is aware, the other place is currently studying grievances brought forward by aboriginal veterans acknowledging that in fact aboriginal veterans have not been treated the same as other veterans returning to Canada.

Will the minister undertake to examine the grievances in testimony being presented in the other place and return to the House with perhaps a better answer?

Hon. Lawrence MacAulay (Secretary of State (Veterans)): Mr. Speaker, yes, certainly I want to mention the very importance of D-Day and the celebrations that are taking place on June 6.

Any studies that have taken place that indicate there are any problems with veterans, veterans pensions or anything involving veterans affairs would be looked at by myself and the Department of Veterans Affairs.

If my hon. colleague has any information that would indicate any aboriginal veteran did not receive the same as any other veteran in the country, I would certainly want to hear about it.

* * *

[Translation]

INDUSTRIAL CONVERSION

Mr. Paul Crête (Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the minister responsible for regional economic development in Quebec.

Oral Questions

Industrial conversion is a concern for all economic stakeholders in Quebec. Last May 15, a report commissioned by the Federal Office of Regional Development—Quebec indicated that the federal government should move quickly to introduce a process to facilitate the conversion of Quebec's defence industry. As it happens, the minister responsible for the FORD—Q has dissociated himself completely from his own study.

Why has the minister dissociated himself so quickly from his own office's studies? Could it be that he is caving in to the pressure exerted by Ontario ministers, particularly the Minister of Industry?

Hon. Paul Martin (Minister of Finance and Minister responsible for the Federal Office of Regional Development—Quebec): Mr. Speaker, as the Minister responsible for the FORD—Q, as the Minister of Finance and as a minister from Quebec, I do indeed support, and I stated this repeatedly during the election campaign, our government's position with respect to helping defence industries convert to civilian production.

Moreover, the Minister of Industry has stated himself on numerous occasions that we have a fund and that we intend to work on this area.

* * *

(1200)

[*English*]

YOUNG OFFENDERS ACT

Mr. Paul E. Forseth (New Westminster—Burnaby): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Justice. Yesterday he made announcements and was quoted in the press to have said that the juvenile system needed change.

Will the minister admit that the current Young Offenders Act brought to Canadians by a previous Liberal government is fundamentally flawed?

Hon. Herb Gray (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Solicitor General of Canada): Mr. Speaker, any law after it has been in place for a number of years can be updated and often improved in the light of experience. That is what we are doing, because we want to respond to the concerns of Canadians with respect to the safety of their homes and their streets. At the same time we want to make sure, as part of our broader strategy, to get at the root causes of criminal behaviour.

We want to update the law, but we want to have a more fundamental review. I hope we have the support of this House in this activity.

GOVERNMENT SERVICES

Ms. Bonnie Brown (Oakville—Milton): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the President of the Treasury Board. I understand the minister is going to introduce more computers in order to improve service to Canadians by their government.

My concern is, will this mean fewer human conversations between Canadians who require help from their government and the public servants who are there to help them?

Hon. Arthur C. Eggleton (President of the Treasury Board and Minister responsible for Infrastructure): Mr. Speaker, rapid technological change is creating opportunities to deliver services in ways that are more accessible, responsive and affordable for Canadians.

Indeed, we are going through the exercise now of trying to integrate many of the systems in government services so that information will be more readily available and we will be able to get answers. The Minister of Public Works is doing the same thing and is involved in this exercise to make information more accessible to Canadians.

Certainly the human factor is a very important one and our frontline workers will continue to be very important in the delivery of such services. While people may be able call up information about government services on their computer or even their television screen, it is important they have the option of being able to contact somebody who can also provide that information.

We are giving Canadians the options. Certainly, one-stop shopping, the concept of not being shoved around from pillar to post when you need information about government services and want to access them, is very important. There will continue to be a human face in the provision of government services which we want to make more efficient and effective in how they are delivered to Canadians.

* * *

PRESENCE IN THE GALLERY

The Speaker: Colleagues, this is again a special day as I wish to draw to your attention in the gallery my brother Speaker from the Legislative Assembly of Alberta, the Hon. Stanley S. Schumacher.

[*Translation*]

Dear colleagues, since this week is National Access Awareness Week, I would like to take this opportunity to introduce to you a group of young people who make a valuable contribution to the work of this House.

[*English*]

I am delighted to present to you the participants in the House of Commons work experience program. These students are part

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of an ongoing partnership between the House of Commons and Ridgemont High School. The program is designed for students with intellectual and developmental disabilities. These wonderful students work alongside our House of Commons staff to serve all of us, the elected representatives.

On behalf of members of this House, I thank each and every one of you very much. Please keep up the good work. Would you please stand and be recognized.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

(1205)

[*Translation*]

GOVERNMENT RESPONSE TO PETITIONS

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

* * *

NATIONAL TRANSPORTATION WEEK

Hon. Douglas Young (Minister of Transport): Madam Speaker, this evening I will be attending the launching of National Transportation Week, 1994 in Thunder Bay, Ontario. As a parliamentarian and minister of the Crown, I feel it is appropriate that I present to my colleagues in this chamber the most important elements of the speech I will deliver tonight.

This year, National Transportation Week coincides with the 50th anniversary of D-Day, the Allied invasion of Normandy. Transportation, and the fledgling Department of Transport, played a critical role in the war effort.

Since the beginning of our history, unique, visionary transportation policies have helped secure freedom and keep the peace. They have brought Canada prosperity and bound Canadians together.

Efficient, reliable, safe and affordable transportation systems to move people and goods are essential to maintain Canada's economic competitiveness. The current transportation system, despite many past successes and significant achievements, is becoming a handicap rather than an advantage to Canadian businesses and consumers. We must modernize quickly. That will require tough choices and difficult adjustments. The future will bring even greater challenges. Much of our system is over-built and we can no longer afford it.

That is not to criticize the past, but to recognize that we must not be held captive by it or to it.

Let me give you some examples: 94 per cent of all air passengers and cargo are handled at only 26 airports out of the 650 in this country; 84 per cent of all rail traffic is carried on

only 33 per cent of our rail lines; and 80 per cent of our marine traffic passes through only 30 out of about 300 public ports.

Our system is not cost-free. Through the federal government alone, Canadian taxpayers are directly subsidizing the Canadian transportation system at a cost of more than \$1.6 billion this year.

The challenge facing me as Minister of Transport is to develop policies that will foster and encourage our transportation industries to rise to the challenges of the 21st century.

Transport Canada must become the proponent of a broader national vision based on the needs of the nation from the Atlantic to the Pacific to the Arctic. We must become advocates for a modern, intermodal transportation system—one that is viable, efficient, safe, affordable, reliable and environmentally friendly.

[*English*]

The most realistic and viable policy thrust I believe must be based on what the 1994 federal budget referred to as commercialization. The budget called on Transport Canada to review the potential for commercialization of a number of our major activities. We intend to do that in consultation with affected parties, with the objective of improving efficiency and ensuring long term viability.

What does commercialization mean? It can be one of many approaches by which market discipline and business principles can be introduced to traditional government activity. Commercialization covers a vast continuum of options, from government agencies to not for profit organizations, to public and private sector partnerships, to employee run companies, to crown corporations, to privatization.

Commercialization means users dictate what services they want provided and users can determine in large part how costs can be controlled. Commercialization means that whatever option is selected must allow market discipline to lead to more efficient service, greater flexibility and less dependence on tax dollars.

Commercialization means the goal must be higher quality and more efficient service to the user at less cost to the Canadian taxpayer. Commercialization will not dilute Transport Canada's highest priority ensuring and where possible enhancing the safety and security of Canadians.

(1210)

Transport Canada is going to look at commercializing many activities. We will consult widely on how that might best be achieved. We will be looking at airport operations, the air navigation system, activities of the Canadian Coast Guard, and operation of the St. Lawrence Seaway.

We believe that carefully planned commercialization will mean major savings to taxpayers and better service to clients. We also believe that the role and structure of crown corporations such as CN and VIA Rail must be reviewed. Because of the great uncertainty in the rail sector and the concern raised by proposals for a merger, I intend to convene a meeting of industry leaders to

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discuss the problems railroads are facing and seek solutions together.

Let me restate our fundamental commitments as we pursue our goal of a national integrated affordable transportation system.

The Government of Canada will continue to meet its constitutional, legal and fiduciary obligations with respect to transportation. The government will continue to ensure reasonable service to Canada's remote communities and for Canadians with disabilities. Transport Canada will not abandon its responsibility to ensure safe and secure transportation standards, rules and regulations. The government will promote a national integrated transportation system that respects the environment.

I believe it is possible to promote the national interest at the same time as we protect the interests of the taxpayers of Canada and I am determined to do both.

Canada is recognized as a world-class G-7 nation; indeed, we are at the top of the class according to the United Nations. The challenge is to remain that way. Maintaining the standard of living Canadians have come to expect will require hard work and many tough choices in the years ahead. It will require co-operation and compassion on the part of those who will be called upon to make those difficult decisions.

[*Translation*]

We must take into account those displaced by change; those abandoned by the travelling public, those communities, villages, towns and cities which will experience loss.

These are some of the challenges facing the Canadian transportation industry. I also want to take this opportunity to wish the hundreds of thousands of men and women who work in the transportation field, from coast to coast to coast, every success, as we launch National Transportation Week.

Mr. René Laurin (Joliette): Madam Speaker, as part of National Transportation Week, I too would like to pay tribute to everyone who works or has worked in this field.

National Transportation Week is a good opportunity to take stock of our transportation system and its importance for the development of our economy in Quebec and Canada. We must understand that transportation is an industry which has a major impact on the whole economy; even more, transportation directly affects people's quality of life. The transportation system is like the circulatory system in the body.

The transportation system has gone through great upheaval in the past ten years. Deregulation has had a major impact on transportation in Quebec and Canada. In some cases, our system is operating beyond capacity and in others it is underused. Federal transportation policies have something to do with many of the problems our transportation system is now experiencing.

The federal government systematically neglected rail transport in favour of air and road transport. As a result of this policy, our roads and airports are congested. Our rail system has been so neglected that today Canada has the oldest and slowest passenger rail transportation system of all industrialized countries.

Meanwhile, we must continually build new runways at our airports and our roads are deteriorating so much that the provinces can no longer repair them adequately.

(1215)

We agree with the minister that we must acquire a truly intermodal system that is efficient, safe and affordable. For this, the government must not leave the field of transportation but instead invest in facilities that will put our transportation system at the leading edge of technology.

Having a modern transportation system provides tremendous benefits. Montreal's airports alone generated \$2.2 billion in economic benefits for the region in 1992, according to a study by the École des Hautes Études Commerciales. Other transportation infrastructures certainly have a major economic impact.

The minister claims that his marketing plan is the answer to all our problems with the transportation system. The market forces are supposed to resolve all our problems. True enough, bringing the decision-making center closer to the users will increase the efficiency of the system, but it would be naive to think that market logic can be applied to the transportation problem across Quebec and Canada.

Some services, like port and airport administration, lend themselves well to being managed locally by non-profit organization. In other cases, like the Canadian Coast Guard, local management poses serious difficulties, but I will come back to this later.

We must also ask ourselves what impact if any, this will have on transportation services provided to remote areas. The minister views the role of his department as ensuring transportation safety. That is to take a very restrictive view to its responsibilities. As it was so aptly put in the Liberal policy on VIA Rail developed by the Liberal caucus in November 1989, the government must provide an efficient and affordable transportation system to people living in remote areas. It sounds like market logic could not be applied to the transportation problem in remote areas.

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Air deregulation resulted in substantial increases in fares to regional destinations. Also, the withdrawal of several of VIA Rail's regional lines has resulted in depriving regional communities of an important development tool. The government cannot decommit from regional transportation, because of the severe impact such a decision would have on regional economic development.

With his privatization plan, the minister is trying to free himself from his obligations towards remote areas. He is also refusing to hold any public hearings on transportation in remote areas. In so doing, he is acting like a cold-blooded policy maker who does not take into account the interests of the public.

If the Coast Guard were to be privatized, this would seriously affect the competitiveness of ports along the St. Lawrence River vis-à-vis those in the Maritimes. Any measure as a direct consequence of which shipowners would have to pay higher tariffs in ports along the river than in the Maritimes is an all-out attack against fundamental economic development tools of Quebec.

It is totally unacceptable. The federal government has been trying for over ten years to pass the cost of operating the Coast Guard onto shipowners and thus, to the public. This is not to say that we are against any form of privatization in the Canadian transportation system. In some cases, privatization can be a powerful tool to promote the expansion of transportation systems. Transfer of airports to local non-profit organizations has been successful. Harbours are another kind of services that could easily be transferred to local non-profit organizations.

Montreal harbour would lend itself well to such a project. Also, if we could give VIA Rail more flexibility to implement projects in cooperation with local interests, it would probably be able to provide better service on existing lines and even restore several of the abandoned lines.

(1220)

Freight services on branch lines could also help to keep several lines in operation and could be affected by CN and CP streamlining policies. Remember that remote areas consider these lines as vitally important for their economic development strategies. What policies does the minister support in this area? None, for now. I will have the opportunity to come back to these issues some other time and indicate to the House our position on this matter.

[English]

Mr. Dale Johnston (Wetaskiwin): Madam Speaker, I am pleased to speak in response to the minister's speech on National Transportation Week.

Transportation affects Canadians economically, socially and culturally. It provides Canadians with links to one another and to the outside world. Increasingly these links are under pressure

through high taxation and outdated practices which are slow to change.

Canada more than ever must adapt its transportation system to the needs of Canadians and to the rest of the world. It is no longer acceptable that every province have different trucking standards for instance or that railways pay for Canada's highways through fuel taxes.

Changes must be the theme of this new government.

The minister has outlined efficiency, reliability, safety and affordability as the keys to his mandate as the minister of transportation. Thus far commercialization is one of his focuses. Commercialization is a noble notion which deserves support. It is not however going to solve all the problems that Canadian transportation companies and their customers face.

For too long governments have put up too many obstacles to transportation and their customers while trying to move them in directions that are contrary to the best interest of all people in Canada.

More than anything, this government should be addressing transportation problems with an eye toward reducing regulation and taxation. This applies at both the federal and provincial levels.

The failure of federal-provincial co-ordination manifests itself in the different transportation standards, subsidies and taxation structures among provinces and the federal government.

Canada still has time to improve its transportation links through federal-provincial co-ordination. However, the government is slow to address this problem. It is no longer adequate to blame one another for failure to achieve agreement.

It is important to note that the minister did not mention highways once throughout his speech. Canada's highways are for the most part in disrepair. They are in disrepair because of the failure of government to recognize three things. First, the federal government's co-operation is the key to an integrated Canadian transportation system. Second, users must pay for the services they receive. Third, the private sector is more efficient at providing transportation services.

Canada's economic deficiency in large part is directly tied to its efficiency in transporting goods and people. A clear example of this is when Canada entered into trade agreements without making the necessary improvements to our transportation system to compete with the Americans, the Mexicans and the rest of the world.

How can Canada compete if it is unable to transport its goods and its people to markets which are looking for the services? Now is the time to make the necessary changes to improve our transportation links and the barriers which stifle growth. We cannot wait any longer.

The government made some changes toward these goals. It has entered into agreements with Mexico to improve transportation links between the two countries. This process must con-

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tinue. The first step toward this goal is the re-opening of the open skies negotiations with the United States, an agreement that is of vital importance to my constituency.

The minister must realize that the 1974 federal-provincial bilateral air agreement with the United States is inadequate and must be updated. The efficiency of Canada's air transportation system is dependent upon it. If airline customers demand a direct flight from Ottawa to Washington why is it not provided?

The Association of Canadian Airport Communities estimates that an open skies agreement costs as much as \$10 billion in annual economic benefits and would create as many as 250,000 new jobs. The announcement earlier regarding the 90,000 government-created infrastructure jobs in my opinion pales by comparison.

(1225)

The government's failure to move forward on an open skies agreement is very costly to Canadians.

It is not unusual that the minister makes reference to the need for an efficient and reliable transportation system. Ministers of Transport have been using that line for a long time but we have seen very little action to bring about such a transportation network. In particular the movement of grain has proven to be inefficient and unreliable. A strike at the west coast, ever-increasing demurrage charges and a shortage of hopper cars has shaken what little faith Canadian farmers had in the grain transportation system.

The Grain Transportation Agency which falls squarely within the purview of the Minister of Transport and handles the allocations of grain cars was shown to be completely incompetent before joint committees of agriculture and transport. Indeed the committee recommended that in the short term the GTA be scrapped in favour of a single person working to allocate grain cars.

The minister has taken no action with respect to the GTA and it is now this minister working toward an efficient and reliable transportation system. Is this how he plans to accomplish it? Far be it from me to question the \$14.7 million budget of the GTA.

The present inaction of this sector of transportation is damaging to our global reputation as a leading and reliable exporter of grain.

I would also like to take issue with the minister's remarks regarding the department's assurance that it will uphold safe transportation standards, rules and regulations. The Transportation Safety Board is a major player in formulating and revising transportation safety regulations. However, two months ago a review of the TSB found its operations to be less than adequate. Indeed, the review suggested that serious flaws were evident as

a result of internal bureaucracy, excessive secrecy, and a reluctance to question government regulations.

By way of example the review found that in 1992 a ferry loading accident and a CN derailment both should have gone to a public review. Further, on May 18, 1994, the TSB recommended the wearing of flotation devices in float planes during all phases of take-off and landing, a recommendation described by industry officials as futile, unenforceable and even dangerous to the occupants of the float planes.

Evidence continues to mount that the Transportation Safety Board established to help ensure the safety of travellers is actually unable to carry out its most important mandate.

This government has yet to overhaul the Transportation Safety Board. How many more Canadian travellers will have to be put at risk before this government establishes reforms to the Transportation Safety Board? Reform should be forthcoming if this minister is serious about his responsibility to safe and secure transportation standards, rules and regulations.

The challenges are formidable and the changes needed are numerous. Transportation in Canada has done well in spite of the barriers and taxation levels of the federal and provincial governments. Canada must find new ways to adapt to a competitive world and transportation will lead the way.

* * *

[Translation]

COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

PROCEDURE AND HOUSE AFFAIRS

Mr. Peter Milliken (Parliamentary Secretary to Leader of the Government in the House of Commons): Madam Speaker, I have the honour to present the twenty-sixth report of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs regarding the list of members of committees.

With leave of the House, I intend to move for concurrence in this report later today.

[English]

I should say that the 26th report simply adds to the list of associate members of the Standing Committee on Justice and Legal Affairs two members of this particular party.

(1230)

Mr. Svend J. Robinson (Burnaby—Kingsway): Madam Speaker, I seek unanimous consent of the House, following consultations, to present the following motion:

That this House, taking note of the courage and valour displayed by war veterans of all religious faiths, urge the Royal Canadian Legion to reconsider its recent decision to allow individual branches to deny entry to members wearing religious headgear, including the Sikh turban and Jewish kipa, and that pending such reconsideration all branches of the legion be urged to respect the fundamental

principle of religious freedom in Canada and permit equal access to all members, including those wearing religious headgear.

I seek unanimous consent of all members to put this motion before the House today.

Mr. Hermanson: Madam Speaker, I rise on a point of order. Pursuant to Standing Order 54 regarding notices of motions, I invite the hon. member for Burnaby—Kingsway to give notice of his resolution on the Order Paper so that the House might give due consideration to the matter he wishes to raise.

Some time ago a motion that my colleague brought forward was denied unanimous consent by the House and she was encouraged to follow the usual proceedings. With that alternative in place, I would not give unanimous consent to the motion.

PROCEDURE AND HOUSE AFFAIRS

Mr. Peter Milliken (Parliamentary Secretary to Leader of the Government in the House of Commons): Madam Speaker, I seek the consent of the House to move concurrence in the 26th report of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs.

Accordingly, if the House gives its consent, I would move that the 26th report of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs, presented to the House earlier this day, be concurred in.

(Motion agreed to.)

JUSTICE AND LEGAL AFFAIRS

Mr. Peter Milliken (Parliamentary Secretary to Leader of the Government in the House of Commons): Madam Speaker, there have also been discussions among the parties and I believe Your Honour will find unanimous consent for the following motion. I move:

That the Standing Committee on Justice and Legal Affairs be authorized to travel to Kingston, Ontario, from June 9 to June 10, 1994 in order to visit penitentiaries in the Kingston area and that the necessary staff to accompany the committee.

(Motion agreed to.)

PROCEDURE AND HOUSE AFFAIRS

Mr. Peter Milliken (Parliamentary Secretary to Leader of the Government in the House of Commons): Madam Speaker, Motion No. 1 standing on the Notice Paper today under motions is a motion for concurrence in the 24th report of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs, presented to the House on Wednesday, June 1. The report concerned technical amendments to the standing orders consequent on recommendations made by the committee concerning the publications of the House.

I think hon. members who are interested in this fascinating subject have had an opportunity to review the report of the

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committee. I believe Your Honour will find unanimous consent today to proceed with concurrence in that very important report, and I so move.

(Motion agreed to.)

* * *

WAYS AND MEANS

Mr. Peter Milliken (Parliamentary Secretary to Leader of the Government in the House of Commons): Madam Speaker, I have another request of the House and I appreciate the indulgence of all hon. members in this regard. It is seeking to clean up the Order Paper to avoid unnecessary printing costs.

I am wondering if the House would give its consent to withdraw notices of ways and means motions listed on the Order Paper under Government Orders Nos. 2, 3, 4, 5, 8, 11 and 12.

(1235)

I am informed in respect of those ways and means motions that all have been incorporated in Notice of Ways and Means Motion No. 14 which was concurred in by the House on May 24. Therefore they are redundant, unnecessary, and could be withdrawn without any inconvenience to hon. members and at a saving of printing costs to the House.

(Government Orders Nos. 2, 3, 4, 5, 8, 11 and 12 withdrawn.)

* * *

PETITIONS

SERIAL KILLER CARDS.

Mr. John Richardson (Perth—Wellington—Waterloo): Madam Speaker, it is my pleasure to present three different petitions from my constituents. The first one deals with the serial killer cards. I place the petition on the table.

BOVINE SOMATOTROPHIN

Mr. John Richardson (Perth—Wellington—Waterloo): Madam Speaker, my second petition deals with the reconstituted BST, Bovine Somatotrophin, a chemically produced drug injected into cows to make them produce more milk.

VIA RAIL

Mr. John Richardson (Perth—Wellington—Waterloo): Madam Speaker, my final petition deals with the topic of VIA Rail, and I place it on the table.

CRIMINAL CODE

Mr. Jack Frazer (Saanich—Gulf Islands): Madam Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 36 it is my duty and honour to rise in the House to present a petition, duly certified by the clerk of petitions, on behalf of 84 constituents of Saanich—Gulf Islands and individuals residing in Canada.

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The petitioners humbly pray and call upon Parliament to ensure that the present provisions of the Criminal Code of Canada prohibiting assisted suicide remain in force.

RIGHTS OF GRANDPARENTS

Mr. Jack Ramsay (Crowfoot): Madam Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 36 I present a petition signed by over 700 Crowfoot constituents.

The petitioners draw our attention to the fact that a natural and fundamental relationship exists between grandparents and grandchildren. However grandparents as a consequence of the death, separation or divorce of their children are often denied access to their grandchildren by their guardians. They believe that the denial to see their grandchildren constitutes elder abuse and can have a serious detrimental impact on both the grandparents and the grandchildren.

Therefore they call upon Parliament to amend the Divorce Act to include a provision similar to article 611 of the Quebec Civil Code which states that in no case may a father or mother, without serious cause, place obstacles between the child and grandparents.

CRIMINAL CODE

Mrs. Rose-Marie Ur (Lambton—Middlesex): Madam Speaker, on behalf of the constituents of Lambton—Middlesex and surrounding area, I am tabling today a petition which has been duly certified by the clerk pursuant to Standing Order 36.

The petitioners ask that Parliament ensure the continuing enforcement of the provisions of the Criminal Code of Canada prohibiting assisted suicides and euthanasia.

ETHANOL

Mrs. Rose-Marie Ur (Lambton—Middlesex): Madam Speaker, I also have the pleasure and honour to table a second petition pursuant to Standing Order 36 in which the constituents of Lambton—Middlesex and surrounding area call upon the Parliament of Canada to maintain the present exemption on the excise portion of ethanol for a decade, allowing for a strong and self-sufficient ethanol industry in Canada.

[*Translation*]

LABORATORY ANIMALS

Mr. Svend J. Robinson (Burnaby—Kingsway): Madam Speaker, I have the honour of tabling two petitions today. The first one is a petition signed by hundreds of Quebecois who are asking Parliament to completely abolish all tests and experiments conducted on animals under the pretence of applying the findings to human beings. The petitioners claim that such practices are not only cruel, unnecessary, unjustifiable, inaccurate and morally unacceptable, but they also invariably lead to misleading conclusions and dangerous results which are ex-

remely detrimental to the health of Canadians and people throughout the world.

[*English*]

CRIMINAL CODE

Mr. Svend J. Robinson (Burnaby—Kingsway): Madam Speaker, I have the honour of presenting a second petition signed by residents of my constituency of Burnaby—Kingsway and in particular signed by many members of the Burnaby detachment of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police as well as civilian employees.

(1240)

The petitioners note that under section 745 of the Criminal Code of Canada convicted murderers sentenced to life imprisonment without a chance of parole for 25 years are able to apply for review after 15 years and that the murder of a Canadian citizen is a most reprehensible crime.

Therefore the petitioners request that Parliament repeal section 745 of the Criminal Code of Canada.

CRIMINAL CODE

Ms. Val Meredith (Surrey—White Rock—South Langley): Madam Speaker, it is my pleasure today to present a petition on behalf of some British Columbians who urge Parliament not to legalize doctor assisted suicides or euthanasia.

It is my pleasure to present it on their behalf.

CANADA POST

Mr. Bill Gilmour (Comox—Alberni): Madam Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 36 I am delighted to present a petition on behalf of my constituents of Comox—Alberni.

The petition states that the rural communities mainly of Merville, B.C., should not have to suffer any form of discrimination with regard to the quality of their postal services.

* * *

QUESTIONS ON THE ORDER PAPER

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

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Maheu): Shall all questions stand?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

[*Translation*]

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Maheu): I wish to inform the House that, following the ministerial statement, Government Orders will be extended for an extra 24 minutes, pursuant to Standing Order 33(2)(b).

*Government Orders***GOVERNMENT ORDERS**

(1245)

*[English]***ELECTORAL BOUNDARIES READJUSTMENT
SUSPENSION ACT, 1994**

The House resumed consideration of the motion in relation to the amendments made by the Senate to Bill C-18, an act to suspend the operation of the Electoral Boundaries Readjustment Act.

Mr. Stephen Harper (Calgary West): Madam Speaker, when I rose before question period in a much noisier Chamber I was stating that our party was prepared to support the bill with some reservation, given the Senate and government amendments that have been tabled today. I was pointing out some of the concerns we had with the bill and the fact that most of the commissions have now reported or are close to reporting in terms of their particular roles.

The effects of the amendments are basically as follows. The Senate is trying to ensure that redistribution is completed prior to the next federal election and the amendments now agreed to by the government should accomplish it. They also go further. They keep the commissions that were originally to be killed by the bill in a suspended existence and allow the present stage of public hearings to be completed so that we save the money we basically had already spent on the process.

Furthermore, and this is important, the amendments will in effect serve as a safety net to the committee examining the redistribution process. They provide a backup position in case the committee is unable to reach agreement on the nature of reforms, particularly if reforms are reached that do not necessitate starting the process from scratch once again.

They make it politically difficult under the motion the House earlier passed, Government Motion No. 10, for the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs to come up with a piece of work that is essentially partisan or that would lead to boundaries and a process that was not agreeable.

Also it is important this whole series of events has shown, particularly when the lower House is forced to act hastily, that the upper House can make a valid contribution. There are many problems with the Senate as it is constituted today and improvements could still be made, but I will leave that for another colleague of mine to comment on.

I point out that with the amendments the government has now introduced, or the Senate amendments that the government is supporting, particularly with the additional change that the government has made, the amendments to the bill are in substance virtually identical to what the Reform Party had proposed before the bill originally left the House.

Originally it was not our intention to see redistribution killed but this is as workable a compromise as we are going to get, given the obvious desire of the government to examine the process.

I urge the government to pursue in the future, not only with this bill, but also with motion No. 10, a really substantial all party agreement on changes to the redistribution process.

When we are dealing with the rules of the game it seems reasonable to expect that we would have a consensual approach. I urge the government to consider the opinions of the major parties in the House, the Liberal Party and the Reform Party. It should also, because elections concern minor parties, consider the effect on the New Democratic Party and the Progressive Conservative Party and whatever input they would have into this legislation.

It might be noticed that I did not mention the Bloc Quebecois in my comments. Frankly I have been mystified at every stage of the bill at the unusual Bloc position of supporting the unilateral changes in the first place. Then the Bloc engaged in a filibuster when it said it wanted the bill passed quickly and now the Bloc says it does not want changes.

We have seen in recent weeks some of the difficulties in having an Official Opposition that does not have the same stake in Canadian democracy and in Canadian institutions, not just on this issue, but on others.

[Translation]

As is obviously the case for many other hon. members here, the recent attitude of the Bloc Quebecois and its leader worries me a lot. But it is important to note that the Bloc claims it will not run in the next federal election. Indeed, the Bloc is not as interested as the Reform Party or the Liberal Party in a system and in issues concerning the next election.

What this illustrates, albeit in a small way, is that they cannot constantly aim at leaving the Federation and still claim to be concerned by all things Canadian.

They cannot have it both ways. This is a fact that we should take into account when considering this bill and the amendments to the Election Act.

[English]

I would like to take the last few minutes of my speech to comment on Motion No. 10. This bill suspends the process beginning in September for a period of nearly a year and government motion No. 10 charges the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs with studying a new law. It has laid out four items.

I will very quickly go over what our party feels very strongly the government should be considering. First, we had insisted and the government had accepted that this committee look at a formula to cap or reduce the size of the House. There has been

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some comment on this because we have been urging, particularly in the case of British Columbia, that it achieve its fair representation.

We cannot have things every way and we recognize that. The size of the House should be capped. Maybe even the size should be lowered, but the proportionality of the provinces should be reflected. We would expect British Columbia and Ontario to increase their number of seats. Obviously this necessitates a new formula and some loss of seats for smaller provinces. You cannot violate the Constitution and forbid proportionality. At the same time you cannot cap the number of seats, as the Bloc Québécois wants, and say that the smaller provinces that are losing share cannot decline in representation. You cannot have all of these things at once and then deny regional representation through the Senate.

(1250)

That is another case where the Bloc's position makes no particular sense. Once again we would urge that the only valid reason for completely stopping this process rather than resuming it will be to come up with a new formula that will cap and reduce the number of seats which is what the public has been telling us.

Another aspect of the motion called for a review of the present method of selecting members of electoral boundaries commissions. The Lortie commission, which spent a great deal of time and money studying these issues and which on these subjects was really addressing non-ideological issues, recommended that the use of independent electoral boundaries commissions for each province and the Northwest Territories, as well as the composition and manner of their appointment, be maintained. The chairman is to be appointed by the chief justice of the province and additional members by the Speaker of the House. That is certainly what our party will be stressing.

The current commissions have not only the chief justices but also additional members who are, by and large, the academics with expertise in this field across the country. It is difficult to imagine finding more qualified people.

The motion asks that they review the rules governing and the powers and methods of the commissions and whether they ought to commence their work on the basis of making necessary alterations to the boundaries of existing electoral districts wherever possible.

Several recommendations here are relevant. If anything we would be restricting, as the Lortie commission suggested, the latitude in terms of population deviation. We should look at more frequent and partial redistribution after each general election rather than after each decennial census. Those are things we would encourage the commission to study, but we

would also suggest that minor changes in those areas are not grounds for suspending, stopping or restarting the process.

Finally, the motion asks that we review the time and nature of the involvement of the public in the work of the commission. We would support strongly the Lortie commission recommendation which was that far from increasing the role of politicians, that their role be decreased, that we looked more at two stages of public hearings rather than a second stage where hearings are in the House of Commons.

Those are our concerns. They are concerns we continue to have about the process being suspended. However, with these amendments there are reasonable safeguards to protect the interests of the public as well as the interests of various parties.

At this point, I congratulate the government on finally seeing the light on some of these issues and accepting amendments that we had originally proposed and that the Senate also has proposed.

[Translation]

Mr. Paul Crête (Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup): Madam Speaker, I am rather surprised at the comments made by the hon. member of the Reform Party. He said that the position of the leader of the Bloc Québécois was rather ambiguous. I think he is bothered by the fact that the goal of our leader, the leader of the opposition, is so clear cut and that the sovereignty of Quebec is clearly part of that goal, and I think we will soon be there. I am sure that what brought on the hon. member's comments is the fact that the Reform Party is going nowhere fast.

Incidentally, the hon. member said that our attitude in this debate had been rather puzzling. I just want to remind him that in eastern Quebec, where according to the readjustment plan submitted to the Electoral Boundaries Readjustment Commission, a whole riding will disappear, the only party that bothered to speak on behalf of the voters in that riding was the Bloc Québécois. We did not see the hon. member for Bonaventure—Îles-de-la-Madeleine, who was directly concerned, or the Reform Party, which says it intends to campaign in Quebec when the next federal election is called.

They did nothing except approve the amendments from the Senate. I thought the Reform Party was in favour of an elected Senate, a Senate that would have real clout, and now they go along with a proposal to add amendments to a bill that is a perfect example of how parliamentary work can become a complete shambles.

(1255)

The bill was tabled too late. Amendments were proposed which were not what the government wanted in the first place, and now we are told our position is wrong, although the position taken by the government and the Reform Party makes no sense at all.

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I would also like to ask the hon. member whether he is aware of the fact that a committee of the House will consider the criteria to be used in determining electoral boundaries. In fact, it was recommended by the House that the committee be able to consider criteria other than demography in determining electoral boundaries, which we feel is entirely appropriate. As far as I know, the Reform Party, like the other parties in this House, is involved in the work of this committee.

So I would like to know whether the hon. member is aware that the committee exists and that it will amend the legislation, at least we hope so, to make determining electoral boundaries more than just a roll of the dice, the only criterion being the number of voters and without any consideration of other important criteria including the size, of the territory and the number of municipalities, things he should be aware of, because in the western provinces these are important considerations, and I am thinking of Saskatchewan particularly.

Mr. Stephen Harper (Calgary West): Madam Speaker, if I understood the question correctly, we recognize the demands of the public in some regions, including western regions, for regional representation in the Parliament of Canada.

Naturally, the committee can study the way to do it within the readjustment process, and we support that. However, there is a limit to the capacity to represent the regions in this House. According to the Constitution, this chamber represents the population. This is a constitutional fact.

If we want effective regional representation, we have to reform the Senate. This is our position and I believe that, in this regard, the position of the Bloc contains a contradiction. You cannot oppose Senate reform and support an effective regional representation in Parliament.

I would also like to make a few personal comments about the position of the leader of the Bloc Québécois. I will not say anything specific, but just point out that there is another contradiction here between the public objectives for the next election and the fact that the Bloc does not intend to run in that election. This is intrinsic to their position on sovereignty. One cannot have sovereignty as the ultimate goal and pretend to be concerned about the future of the country. This is a fact.

I say to the government that the position taken by the Bloc in this debate demonstrates that we have an opposition party that has a vested interest in disagreeing with every possible proposition. We have seen it during the constitutional debates. The same applies to the electoral legislation. I am advising the government to follow the consensus of federalist parties and to be wary of the Bloc position, given its *raison d'être*.

(1300)

[English]

Mr. Peter Milliken (Parliamentary Secretary to Leader of the Government in the House of Commons): Madam Speaker, I have two questions for the hon. member.

I listened to his speech with great interest. I know that the hon. member for Calgary West is something of a party expert in matters of electoral reform. The hon. member for Kindersley—Lloydminster is a member of the House committee on procedure and House affairs which is about to embark on a study as he knows pursuant to House reference of replacement arrangements for the current electoral boundaries readjustment act.

In his speech he set out a series of parameters. I thought I heard him say things to the effect that any new bill would have to comply with certain minimum demands like a freeze on the number of members if it was going to be acceptable. I could go on with a list but I do not want to repeat everything he said.

I was very surprised to hear him suggest that the committee had to comply with these demands if the Reform Party was going to agree to the bill.

The hon. member for Kindersley—Lloydminster has been impressing on me the importance of entering on this discussion with an open mind so the committee can come to its own conclusions based on the evidence that it hears from the witnesses it expects to call both next week and in July when the committee will be having hearings while other members are away.

I am wondering if the hon. member is saying we are not to enter on this discussion with an open mind but in fact are to come to the conclusions that he has recommended in his speech. If so, I hope he will communicate those views to the hon. member for Kindersley—Lloydminster who I think would be appalled if that were the case given the representations he made to me.

Second, I did not hear him mention his support for the Senate in his speech and I know in public utterances, rather pious public utterances I may say, outside this House the hon. member suggested that the Senate should block this bill.

I did not hear him mention that again in his speech here and I wonder if perhaps he could illumine the House on that point and let us hear his views on what the Senate should do, should have done, or should continue to do with Bill C-18.

Mr. Harper (Calgary West): Madam Speaker, I am happy to answer both questions.

First, on the issue of the committee study, obviously myself as well as the hon. member for Kindersley—Lloydminster would expect the committee to do a wide ranging study, but in the end we have to give the public a reason to suggest why we would completely suspend and eventually kill the process that has been under way.

I would suggest that there are certain minimum parameters that would justify killing it this time as opposed to waiting for

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next time. We are not going to change a couple of commas in the Elections Act and use that as an excuse, as I said before, to flush \$5 million or \$6 million down the toilet. I would suggest that the public itself has some fairly obvious parameters in mind.

I am rushed here but I will answer the second question which concerns my position on the Senate.

Obviously now that the Reform Party supports the bill I would urge the Senate to give it consideration and to see the wisdom in supporting it. The Senate has the constitutional power to pass or defeat any piece of legislation. That power is not conferred upon it by myself.

Mr. Ted McWhinney (Vancouver Quadra): Madam Speaker, I welcome this opportunity to note to all members that the making of law in Parliament is a dialectical act, that there are many players, and what we have seen has been a constructive interaction as it should happen between the House and the Senate and in fact the public at large.

If we were looking at the players involved we would have to take note of the resolutions of the Liberal Party, federal and British Columbia branch, the resolutions passed there and adopted unanimously by the annual meeting of the Liberal Party, conversations between members of the House and senators and a process that results in a measure coming back from the Senate and being acted upon by the House. I will have more to say on the substance of that in a moment.

Let me address one of the problems that has worried me in connection with this whole process under way and that concerns some issues of the constitutionality of the very act upon which the electoral commissions have been operating, the Representation Act of 1985.

When that first appeared it seemed to me that in artificially capping the representation for British Columbia and other fast-growing provinces it raised basic issues of constitutionality that should be tested. Since the end result was to eliminate the seat of a New Democratic Party member from Vancouver, the mayor of Vancouver launched a legal action challenging the constitutionality of this measure.

(1305)

I would have preferred to see the challenge based on the simple issue of the artificial capping. Instead, it raised the more fundamental question whether a measure changing the proportional representation of provinces in the House could be adopted by legislation of the federal Parliament alone and not by the more complicated and difficult procedures envisaged under the Constitution for that.

I would add that several of the Conservative senators, and there are contradictions here, who are now arguing very strongly, and I welcome their support, for extra seats for British Columbia participated as cabinet members in the decisions which in effect limit B.C. now to two seats instead of the five that it would otherwise have been entitled to in accordance with the 1991 census. But that is in the past and we look forward to the future.

I should say though that when the mayor of Vancouver launched his action the federal government did not support it. Nor did the government of British Columbia. I think this is worth comment because its chief legal officer at the time has suggested that perhaps Bill C-18 has a Quebec angle in it, designed artificially to preserve Quebec seats in the House. I think this is a rather far-fetched idea but if it were so then in relation to the Representation Act of 1985 why did the Attorney General of British Columbia not intervene in that litigation before the Supreme Court?

I simply commend to members the litigation, in particular the opinion of Justice Lambert which seems to me even more persuasive today than it was then.

Let us come on to this particular issue with the Senate itself. I welcome the discussions that we have had with individual senators. I welcome the response made by the Senate to what I think and hope will be an acceptance of the proposal made now by the House.

I see a similar contradiction in the position of the Reform Party opposite. I think if you capped the size of the House of Commons, the point about the Representation Act of 1985, then automatically either you gel permanently the size of the representation from fast-growing provinces like British Columbia and Ontario or you reduce those. You diminish the representation of provinces in which the Reform Party has of course members. Saskatchewan and Manitoba are the very obvious examples.

There are contradictions there. It is very important to remember this before taking absolutist positions on how many seats we should have. I think it is worthy of note that British Columbia delegates to the Liberal Party and British Columbia members have contented themselves with asking for two seats more and not the five that on census returns we would be entitled to.

Let me come back to the issue of what this is all about, Bill C-18, its substantive measures. It would have been a pity if discussion of this had been buried in discussion of other issues on size of provincial representation in the House.

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We missed an opportunity in the 1980s to update our constitution in the areas of the electoral processes. The electoral processes are more important even than constitutional processes. They are pre-constitutional, they go to the root of constituent power. It is basic that they should be in the Constitution.

I think if the events had been different with the Trudeau government patriation project of 1980 to 1982, provisions on electoral representation would have been included in some detail. As it is, our constitution in comparison to virtually every other liberal democratic constitution of today is naked as to provisions as to electoral representation.

You look at the United States, France, Germany, Japan or India and you find detailed provisions in the constitution or else, and sometimes in supplement, detailed decisions of the Supreme Court, jurisprudence constante in the civil law sense. This makes for a body of opinions, a body of rules that guide in the case of the United States the state legislatures which are charged with the duty in effect of becoming electoral boundary commissions and the similar bodies in other countries.

(1310)

We do not have this. I think the preoccupation in the 1980s and the early 1990s with the single issue in the Constitution prevented us from making changes that would bring us into the 21st century. This is very basic.

I think in terms of electoral commissions that the process of the appointment of commissioners is casual and ad hoc and not really very acceptable. I say this having served as an electoral boundary commissioner in a pre-political capacity. The Speaker of the House, Madam Sauvé, asked me if I would serve. She said she was anxious to get a non-partisan figure of recognized public integrity. It was an honour to serve. But I think the process in which simply the Speaker appoints is not good enough today. This is as serious a function as that performed by Supreme Court judges and other senior crown officials. Perhaps it should go to Parliament for some sort of confirmation which would inevitably insist upon multipartisan representation or participation in the choice of the commissioners.

One of the things that is very noticeable with the recent group of commissioners is the absence of continuity. When I sat we had a great advantage. A member of our commission, Olive Woodley from Vernon, had served on several different commissions. Therefore when I from my specialized professional viewpoint would advance a proposition she would counter by saying "this is how we did it in the past and this is why". Of course, I yielded to those arguments when they made sense.

It is a fact that none of the members of the 11 commissions, 33 in all, has had any previous experience. They are neophytes. References have been made to the judges as chairmen but the judges traditionally have been neutral and have not interfered.

So the work is thrown upon the lay commissioners. Is this a good thing?

In the past the chief electoral commissioner was consulted by the Speakers in making appointments. This time the chief electoral commissioner was not. We have this in evidence to the committee on House Procedures, given on the evening that Bill C-18 was adopted by the House.

The chief electoral commissioner also throughout the regime of Mr. Castonguay constituted himself a member of each electoral commission. Mr. Kingsley interpreting his mandate narrowly and I think correctly abstained from doing this. So there are commissions in a sense sent out on to uncharted seas.

One of the problems also as I have said is that there is nothing in the Constitution on this. Mr. Trudeau would have liked to have got around to it but the facts were he was diverted by the gang of eight and other situations and this was left out. If you look at the electoral law passed conformably to the Constitution on this you will find that while it establishes some antinomies, things that may be considered, it gives no guidance as to how they are to be applied. I think this is wrong and that it is for Parliament to establish the norms guiding and governing electoral boundary commissioners.

Let us take one example, the principle of continuity. In that special relationship that Edmund Burke discussed between the member and constituents, the continuity is very, very important. It does not really make sense with 208 new members in the House to have this wholesale revision of boundaries even in a province like Newfoundland that I understand increased only 738 people between the 1981 and 1991 census. Why revise all five constituencies? Is it a make-work project?

I do not imply that the commissioners did not act with due care and consideration. When I acted as a commissioner we accepted that being a member of Parliament is a difficult role and that one should respect the relationship between member and constituent and that continuity was a factor to take into account.

I think this time the commissions have gone too far the other way. In an absence of instruction they are entitled to do that. I think it is time for Parliament to lay down rules.

Let me take some other examples of variations that a more experienced commission in terms of continuity would have established.

(1315)

I was intrigued that my colleagues from the Kootenays made the point that the commission had taken a two-dimensional topographical approach to the constituency boundaries in the B.C. interior. A three-dimensional approach is needed because there are mountain ranges in the middle. What they have done in that area is to reinsert what was the rule until 1960 but was changed then because somebody had pointed out the mountain range in the middle of the constituency and that to get around it

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involved a laborious 48-hour journey. Therefore there are areas where knowledge becomes very important.

More important, I would raise the issue of the absence of guiding constitutional principles here.

In the detailed jurisprudence of the United States Supreme Court, Mr. Justice Brennan elaborated on the principle of what he called benign discrimination in the formation of electoral boundaries. Mr. Justice White in the same case raised the issue of properly taking into account racial factors in making decisions.

What they were concerned with was whether—and again I use another term of art—you can indulge an electoral commission in positive gerrymandering artificially to create an electorate by geographical distortion to produce a majority for one minority group that otherwise would not be represented. Why it came to the Supreme Court of the United States was that another minority said: “You helped this one but not us”.

I raise the issue of whether electoral boundary commissions in Canada should be operating on the basis of creating artificially single ethnic majority constituencies or not.

I simply cite the example in British Columbia of the five city seats held by the Liberal Party. It was not planned that way, but it does happen that the five members each represent different ethnic communities. There is representation from the Caribbean, from Italy, from the Punjab, from China via Hong Kong, and from what used to be called one of the two founding nations. There are five different people, but each running in a constituency that is multiethnic.

My own constituency has 22 different ethnic communities. To gain a nomination for an election you have to seek an interethnic consensus. That is closer to the Canada of the 21st century, but it seems to me in B.C. the commission is pushing us the other way, back to the 19th century configuration.

Again, there are perfectly legitimate reasons for doing that. The United States Supreme Court sanctioned just such a rule in the United States. But this is too serious and challenging a constitutional issue to be left to commissioners appointed ad hoc for one particular journey at one particular time. It should be decided by Parliament.

Those principles should be in the Constitution, whether it is an amendment to the charter, or the jurisprudence of the Supreme Court, or both, as it is in the United States and the other countries I have cited. In other words, the committee on House procedures has an obligation to establish some sort of motor principles, directive principles, that could be carried out by electoral boundary commissions in the future and indeed in the present case.

There is another big gap in our constitutionalism on electoral processes. There is no mention of political parties, although 25 years ago the German Supreme Court decided they are the key to the parliamentary processes and must be included and subject to the law.

What I am saying is we missed an opportunity in the 1980s to bring our Constitution up to date on what is basic to any free and democratic society: a system of fair, responsible electoral representation. We have to do it now. The time limit imposed by the Senate originally, in effect six months, was not enough. Two years would have been reasonable, but I think it can be done in one year.

I therefore welcome the amendment proposed by the government House leader to the bill as returned by the Senate. I welcome the indications being given that this may be agreeable to the Senate. I welcome the support of the Bloc and I do welcome the support, if somewhat tardy, of the Reform Party on this.

(1320)

There is a heavy responsibility for the committee on House procedures. It can be done. It will give us a truly modern Constitution that responds to the need which is basic to a free and democratic society: a fair, open electoral system implemented by people responsible to Parliament and subject therefore to all-party control as to their operations. If possible, put the controlling principles into the Constitution, into the Charter of Rights and Freedoms so that every citizen of Canada can read them, study them and apply them.

Mr. Elwin Hermanson (Kindersley—Lloydminster): Madam Speaker, I appreciate the comments of my hon. colleague from Vancouver Quadra. We happen to sit on that same procedure and House affairs committee which will be reviewing the electoral boundaries redistribution process.

He mentioned in his speech that he has been an electoral boundaries commissioner. What adequate provisions in the selection of all Elections Canada officials, including those who would be responsible for determining who the new commissioners, would he consider might be fair? What would be the best process for determining it is not a partisan process and there could be absolutely no question of gerrymandering or political influence?

Mr. McWhinney: Madam Speaker, I speak of course only as a private member, I cannot engage the government. My own recommendation is conveyed in a series of writings over a period of time. I spoke most recently to the Institute for the Administration of Justice which is a sort of trade union of the Supreme Court judges of Canada.

My own suggestion would be that while the government might nominate the process should be approved by a parliamentary committee. It could be the committee on House management, but it should go to a committee. In that sort of situation there

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should be an opportunity for examination of the nominees as to their qualifications. I would anticipate the sort of situation there is in other countries, a form of multi-party support for the eventual commissioners who would be nominated.

Once you get it into a system where Parliament itself speaks on the qualifications and makes a decision you would inevitably get a system where the government alone is not imposing its will, but you would get a consensus choice. It would narrow down to the people with recognized competence, but you should probably be aiming for a permanent standing electoral commission.

You can look at the errors the 1993 commission made. They are very similar to the ones I would have made 10 years ago as a commissioner if I had not had a wise person on the commission who had already served two or three times and was able to say that something was a foolish proposal or that something should be changed.

I envision a standing commission, but I also envisage ratification of the appointments by a parliamentary committee or some other parliamentary process.

Ms. Margaret Bridgman (Surrey North): Madam Speaker, in reference to the hon. member's statement on the capping of MPs, I cannot quite seem to follow how that is actually going to carve the boundaries out in stone or stabilize the electoral boundaries.

Where I am coming from in this is that I see three components here as far as mathematics is concerned. There is the number of MPs and the total population of the country. Divide the MPs into that and you come up with a figure on representation. Based on that and the movement across the country plus those persons coming in, I cannot see when you get that figure of representation how that is not going to affect moving the boundaries about as well to accommodate that.

Mr. McWhinney: Madam Speaker, our dilemma here relates to the federal system and the gelling of regionalism in terms of particular provinces. The reality is if the size of the House is kept at 295 and the population jumps by a million, let us say predominantly in British Columbia and Ontario, then either you deny the fast-growing provinces the benefits of their increased population or you take them away from Manitoba, Saskatchewan and probably Quebec.

(1325)

Having sat as a commissioner but also being a member, I wonder if that is fair to the people in those provinces. I wonder if it is politically realizable, first of all. Would we ever get a measure of that sort through the House or through a constitutional amendment if it is needed, but I also wonder if it is fair. I do express grave reserves. It has been pointed out to me as a

commissioner about changing boundaries arbitrarily. We have to recognize that members do build up a relationship of trust with the constituency; it is one of the worthwhile things in a democratic society.

I would say we can live with an increase in the size of the House for the next period of time. The countries that have gelled their membership, like Great Britain, have a huge House first of all, but also have a relatively static internal organization. There are no provinces and no regional subdivisions which have to be respected under the constitutional order, so there is much more flexibility.

I would hate to have to say to colleagues in Saskatchewan that they must give up two seats, or that Manitoba must give up four seats so British Columbia can have more. My resolution of the dilemma is simply to allow the increase to go for at least the next decade and let us see what happens. It is only going to be two, four, six, for the next 10 years. Otherwise I do foresee anguished political choices which involve my voting to deprive people in other provinces of seats and I do not want to do that.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Paul Crête (Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup): Madam Speaker, as I rise to speak on Bill C-18, I feel like saying that the saga goes on. This legislation has created quite a mess; I can personally attest to that. The causes are not hard to find. The Liberal government dragged its feet on the issue of the electoral map. It introduced this bill much too late, which caused electoral boundaries commissions to sit, because the legislation had not yet passed all the stages.

Now we are at the stage where a non-elected Senate is proposing an amendment and, all of a sudden, the other parties decide that it looks like the most appropriate solution.

To give you an inkling of how absurd the situation is, I will tell you about my own experience with the electoral boundaries commission's hearings in eastern Quebec.

Around ten groups had registered to come before the commission the days I was there. Only two, I believe, finally appeared because people understood that the hearings had been suspended for 24 months. Elected representatives, who sit in the House of Commons, had voted this 24-month delay. And now, we have to reconsider this bill, which has been sent back here by non-elected people, and give a different message to voters.

Because witnesses are not appearing at hearings, we are going to have to start the consultation process all over again. Needless to say, this will result in more waste, since commission members, who travelled across Canada, have incurred travel expenses and received a salary, as they should, for the work they had done. They were mandated to hold hearings, because the government did not present its bill on time.

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Fortunately, these people are extremely competent; at least, those I met at the hearings in Rimouski were. The Bloc Québécois was the only party to make presentations, both in Rimouski and in Percé, and I had the opportunity to say that the disappearance of a riding in eastern Quebec was unacceptable. It is unacceptable that this area be torn apart in such a way.

It was interesting to see the commissioners' reaction to our brief. They explained that the present legislation does not give them any flexibility in the interpretation of the criteria.

(1330)

So, we will still have submitted our recommendations. The House of Commons committee that will convene on what I would call the architecture of the legislation, the make-up of electoral ridings, will have to take into account, in the redistribution, such criteria as demography, but also the territory covered, the number of municipalities being served, as well as sociological and economic components of the territory.

What is surprising is that the current commissioners proposed to us possible amendments to the initial proposition that they had made. Due to the inadequate representation of groups that had registered but withdrawn because of the message given by the government that everything was postponed for 24 months, we are now in a situation where a very interesting debate on other adjustment possibilities cannot be held.

Today, as I was saying earlier, the saga continues. We are back in the House with amendments from the other place with which the government suddenly agrees. The government, which initially felt that a 24-month timetable was needed to adequately review the legislation in time for the next election and still allow for consideration of criteria other than demography, is now back-tracking. It has decided that a 12-month timetable is enough. They gave the population a new message and I wonder who will be able to find their way in the mess created by the government and by the amendments of non-elected people who allow themselves to make propositions regarding a vital element: representation. The redistribution of electoral ridings is for the next election.

The next general election should normally be held in four or five years but it might as well be in one or two years if this government systematically refuses to acknowledge the repeated requests of opposition parties for a clear constitutional position. This government, as a result of the referendum on the sovereignty of Quebec and the benefits that province will gain from it, will certainly be forced to adjust and possibly ask Canadian electors what position they want to take, what kind of government they want to hold negotiations. We might have to do that. Therefore, it is important that the type of representation that we have be clear and accurate, but this government does not obtain a

passing grade in this regard, it does not satisfy the need for a democratic and satisfactory electoral system.

I would like to draw the attention of this House to an inconsistency in the amendment under title 2, page 1, which proposes to replace lines 17 through 21. The amendment provides for the temporary suspension of electoral commission work. At the same time, this House will examine the criteria which should be taken into account for the modification of the electoral map. We might once more find ourselves in an absurd situation where the House committee could ask experts—and I hope that the members of the electoral commissions can be considered as experts—to come before the committee when their work as commissioners has been suspended. Commissioners whose work has been suspended would therefore be asked to appear as commission members. This is unheard of.

Of course, these people could always be asked to appear on an individual basis, but in that case they would be entitled to extra pay, which will add to the saga surrounding C-18 and the costly mess it has created. Why do we find ourselves in a situation where the government and the Reform Party are forced to change position, which further complicates everything?

(1335)

The Liberal government and the Reform Party must have received strong messages from their constituents, the former at the Liberal convention and, in the case of the Reform members from the West, they must have had the message that the electoral map had to be changed as soon as possible in order to allow British Columbia, for example, to have adequate representation.

We, from the Bloc Québécois, have never been against the fact that each province be adequately represented in the electoral process. We only wanted to show that the blind application of demographic criteria has a major negative impact on regions whose population is dwindling.

When studying what characterizes an economic, social and cultural area, we realize that the first thing that brings about atrophy is the loss of jobs, which leads to the migration of young people and even of seniors, because they no longer have access to essential services. Then, one day, those people no longer have any representation.

That is the effect that the electoral map had on the eastern part of Quebec. For several years, there were five constituencies in eastern Quebec. The proposal which was made by the electoral commission pursuant to the legislation and which only takes into account the demographic criteria results in the elimination of a riding. Therefore, the people living in the Gaspé Peninsula and in the Matapédia area will find themselves in the same riding, even if municipalities are 300 km apart, not to say 1000 km in winter.

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This kind of representation is unacceptable to constituents, to all the people living in that part of Quebec and Canada. And this could happen elsewhere. If I look for example at the evolution of the demographic situation in Saskatchewan, I think it would be important to take those other criteria into account because if we consider only the demographic factor, we will systematically contribute to the perpetuation of something we did before, that is reduce the impact of resource regions, regions where we have made sure we occupied the territory and had good representation.

It is not only out of social concern that we want to guarantee the future of our regions, it is also for economical and cultural reasons; if we do not occupy the territory as we did in the past, the resources in our part of the country will become progressively under-utilized. Therefore, the type of representation we want to guarantee is very important.

We were told: "The Bloc Quebecois does not want to participate in the next federal election, it says there will be no such federal election because it will win the referendum on sovereignty. So why does it take action on this issue?" Let me tell you that our mandate is to defend Quebec's interests and, in so doing, we must respect the choice that Quebecers will make in the referendum.

We believe we can bring them to choose Quebec instead of Canada, but if they were to decide otherwise, we all want to be absolutely sure we conscientiously fought for Quebec's interests. To do so, we must anticipate all possible scenarios and make sure that Quebec will always be well represented within Canada.

Even though I hope this will not happen, if Quebecers were to choose to stay in Canada, they will require adequate representation. Adequate representation means, for example, what we were given by the Meech Lake Accord which was rejected, following initiatives of the party which now forms the government. We were offered 25 per cent of the seats, and this percentage will have to be maintained in the future.

So, we are fighting for the interests of Quebecers, for the region where a riding was done away with. We are defending the interests of people in the Lower St. Lawrence, the Gaspé Peninsula and the Magdalen Islands. We want to make sure that the number of ridings in this region will guarantee adequate economic, social and cultural development.

(1340)

Just imagine that under the Conservatives, although we had five members and even ministers, our regional TV stations were closed. We do not want to be, in the future, in a situation where we could be further disadvantaged because we would had an even smaller representation.

Also, how can we be sure, given the uncompromising attitude of the present government in its dealings with the provinces, and given its determination not to re-open the constitutional issue, that it will not have to hold elections within a year? We have to consider every possibility and try to protect Quebec interests in accordance with the overwhelming mandate we received as a result of the October 1993 election.

In the area of readjustment of electoral boundaries, the Bloc Quebecois has done its duty. It co-operated with the government for the 24-month period, but it also participated, when possible, in the hearings to have maximum representation.

The other side, however, never ordered the electoral commissions to stop working. We found ourselves in a terrible mess, in which we are sinking deeper with this new amendment. For my part, I believe that, by agreeing with the arguments of a non-elected House, the government is insulting Canadians and Quebecers. The House had decided that a 24-month suspension was appropriate, but under the pressure of more or less official representations from a non-elected body, it reversed its decision, and I believe that it is setting a dangerous precedent. For people who all said that they wanted Parliament to be effective, Bill C-18 is the perfect example of everything one should not do to make sure that it sails smoothly through Parliament.

With this bill, they accumulated every possible blunder. They set a deadline, presenting all kinds of arguments in favour of it. The Reform Party and the Liberal Party did not agree on what it should be, and today they both come back with a shorter deadline. They give us the same arguments, but this time to justify the new deadline. This is not doing much to improve the government's credibility among voters.

This is a wonderful opportunity to highlight how useless the Senate is or, in some cases, how obstructive it can be. This year, we are going to spend \$43 million to keep that useless place in operation, when in fact there is a consensus in Quebec that this institution is totally useless. In Quebec, we abolished the Legislative Council 25 years ago. It was similar to the Senate, and since we abolished it, we have not had to put up with annoying situations of this kind.

Mr. Milliken: Everyone in Quebec loves the Senate.

Mr. Crête: Everyone in Quebec loves the Senate. Well, I invite the hon. member making this comment to come to Quebec this summer and ask people if they know who their senator is. I think he is in for quite a surprise!

An hon. member: Some question!

Mr. Crête: I suppose I could even put the same question to the members of this House. Do they know which senator is responsible for their riding? The Senate has put before the House proposals which have influenced the government. The justification for such action remains a mystery.

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(1345)

Now we find ourselves in the position of probably having to hire an information officer to explain to the public what is going on with Bill C-18. A bill was introduced and a decision was made to postpone the process for 24 months. Now the Senate has intervened and the process will be delayed only 12 months. Is some other body preparing to tell us to act differently?

Our message to the people of Canada is that this Parliament does not know what it is doing. If it acts this way when an issue like this arises, what will it do later on when dealing with other matters?

I hope that we can settle this matter once and for all, and then move on to something else. I hope that we can focus our energies on bringing about real economic recovery to take the place of the timid measures which this government has introduced, and in the process, end this debate which has taken up more of Parliament's time and energies than it deserved to.

[English]

Mr. Dennis J. Mills (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Industry): Madam Speaker, it is the end of the week and I am sitting here listening to members from the Bloc talking about an issue that they will not even have to deal with two years from now. If they win or lose the election, they all said they are going to quit and go back to their roots.

I want to ask a very specific question because the member talked in his speech about how much he cared about the economy and about putting people back to work.

He mentioned during his speech a couple of times, not just the economy of Quebec but the economy of Canada, and I was struck by the sensitivity to the whole country and not just Quebec.

As he knows, we had a Moody's downgrading yesterday afternoon. We are hearing from many people that the uncertainty with regard to the issue of separation in Quebec is one of the factors that is causing the jitters in our economy.

Does the member not think it would be much more productive, in trying to put his constituents back to work, all of the people who are out of work in the province of Quebec and in every region, to talk about building Canada rather than trying to destroy it?

[Translation]

Mr. Crête: Madam Speaker, I find this question particularly interesting because the present uncertainty is not due to this issue. It results from the failure of the Canadian federal system to resolve its own problems over the past 15 years. It never resolved its problems. In 1982, it managed to repatriate the Canadian Constitution without Quebec's consent and since 1982, not one single government in Quebec, whether sovereigntist or federalist—and we cannot say that people like Mr.

Bourassa or Mr. Johnson have no backbone—has agreed to sign it. This goes to show that the federal system has problems of its own to resolve.

The present uncertainty of the federal system reveals itself in the national debt. As for Canada's rating problems, in the short term, the deciding factor is not the Quebec issue, but this \$500 billion debt and the fact that it was allowed to grow from approximately \$100 billion in 1980 to over \$500 billion today. That is a \$400 billion increase in just 15 years! If I were an investor, I would tell myself: "There is something wrong with those guys. We cannot tell where they are going". That is the problem with Canada.

Also, the hon. member indicated that he was pleasantly surprised by my sensitivity to the whole country. Of course, I have am concerned with Canada, in economic terms. I do have economic concerns with regard to the Free Trade Accord which governs trade throughout North America as well as the new accord which replaces the GATT accords and which has a global scope. I want countries in the South to have healthy economies because they import our products. I want English Canada, and Ontario in particular, to be able to keep going the way it is now because Ontario is our main client in Quebec and vice versa. This is something we must bear in mind. So, I want excellent economic relations to be maintained between Quebec, the United States, and Mexico.

(1350)

The best way of ensuring direct economic relations for the future is to see to it that a small entity like Quebec can develop unhampered, take decisions quickly and get out of the system to rid us once and for all of this dinosaur, the Canadian federal system.

[English]

Mr. Elwin Hermanson (Kindersley—Lloydminster): Madam Speaker, the hon. member for Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup mentioned that he had attended one of the public hearings to consider the new boundaries as they were readjusted by the current boundaries readjustment commission.

I too had the privilege of appearing before the commission in my province of Saskatchewan. I found the hearings to be very fair. In fact there were some of the same sentiments in Saskatchewan. Not many submissions were made because of the confusion surrounding the whole issue and the government's mismanagement of the entire affair. I found the whole atmosphere, the environment of the discussion, to be totally non-partisan. I found the committee to be competent and willing to listen to the constructive proposals that were brought forward through the submissions.

Not being very familiar with what was happening in the province of Quebec I wonder whether the hon. member found the same environment and the same competence among the

commissions in his province, at least at the hearings he was able to attend.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Crête: Madam Speaker, in response to the last part of the question, I can say that the legislators on the commission were Quebecers. They are very competent in their field, as I pointed out in my speech.

Yet the commissioners themselves told us they were required by the act to consider only the demographic factor when other criteria should be taken into account. That was the issue referred to the House committee.

I think it is important to take these criteria into account and to give ourselves the time we need to do so, as provided for in the initial 24-month timeframe.

I would like to add one more thing. Given the mandate we received from Quebecers, we must anticipate all possibilities. If we are faced with another election for one reason or another, we must have as good an electoral map as possible in order to defend ourselves. Finally, as long as we pay taxes to Ottawa, we will be represented because there is no taxation without representation. Quebecers decided they wanted to be represented by sovereigntists, and they did so in a more significant way than for any other party in Canada.

[*English*]

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Maheu): We still have two more minutes.

Is the House ready for the question?

An hon. member: No.

Mr. Hermanson: Madam Speaker, no. We want to either resume debate or give the hon. member the chance to ask a question. I think we are about two minutes away from private members' business. Rather than launching into my speech and only getting two minutes into it, if the hon. member had another question I would gladly defer to him.

An hon. member: No.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Maheu): Is the House ready for the question?

Some hon. members: No.

Mr. Elwin Hermanson (Kindersley—Lloydminster): Madam Speaker, today I am rising to speak about the changes that the other place is proposing to Bill C-18. I am glad we have a chance to revisit the issue.

Bill C-18, as it was originally envisioned by the government, was a very serious breach of the fundamental principles of democracy, namely preventing the intervention of political parties in the design, conduct and outcome of elections in Canada.

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The electoral process in Canada is probably the most fair, unbiased and most professional in the world. Our electoral process is not perfect and I hope we will have the opportunity to discuss some improvements at a later date.

The intent of Bill C-18 not only threatens the non-partisan aspect of our democratic process but it jeopardizes the reputation that Canada enjoys internationally as a country that can be counted on to set high standards of impartiality in regard to the electoral process. Witness that Canada is very often called on to supervise or observe elections around the world. The Ukrainian and South African elections are two recent examples of this.

I cannot emphasize enough the damage that would be done to Canada's international reputation if Bill C-18 were to have passed in its original form. It should be obvious that Reformers were correct in their analysis of the bill. The government should have accepted our amendments.

The reasons why this bill had to be—

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Maheu): It being 1.54 p.m., the House will now proceed to the consideration of Private Members' Business as listed on today's Order Paper.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

[*Translation*]

DEPARTMENT OF LABOUR ACT

Mr. Réal Ménard (Hochelaga—Maisonneuve) moved that Bill C-243, an Act to amend the Department of Labour Act (eligibility for assistance for long-service employees), be read the second time and referred to a committee.

He said: Madam Speaker, I will start by saying that since I had the pleasure of being elected to this House to represent the people of Hochelaga—Maisonneuve, I never felt so strongly that I was speaking on a subject that is important for Montreal. It is important for Montreal, of course, but for other places as well, because the main purpose of the bill before hon. members of this House is to correct a terrible form of discrimination suffered by workers in Montreal and elsewhere.

I will have an opportunity to explain this discrimination in detail. First, with your permission, I would like to remind those listening to us this afternoon about POWA. This is not the first time that we have discussed POWA in this House. Members previously elected to Parliament, including the members for Saint-Léonard, Saint-Denis and Westmount—Saint-Henri, spoke many times in the past to call strongly for major improvements to POWA.

I am therefore pleased to speak because I agree with what my hon. colleagues said in the past. POWA is a federal-provincial agreement, financed 70 per cent by the central government and 30 per cent by the participating provinces. It seeks to com-

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pensate and provide income support for laid-off workers. As you know, in these tough economic times, there are many lay-offs.

The joint federal-provincial agreement on POWA sets forth some criteria for workers to qualify. The agreement provides that workers will be eligible depending on the size of the municipality or community in which the company is located.

Let me give you the example of Montreal. When people are laid off in the Greater Montreal, something which has occurred a number of times in the past, the agreement provides that, to be eligible for POWA, a minimum of 100 workers must have been laid off. This is the first condition.

Consequently, before a worker can be eligible for the program on an individual basis, some important collective considerations related to the major change occurring, will determine whether that worker is eligible or not.

The second condition to qualify is that 8 per cent of laid off workers must be 55 or over. In Montreal, this criteria does not present great problems, compared to the rule requiring that a minimum of 100 workers be laid off. I will come back to this later on.

(1400)

The Program for Older Worker Adjustment has been in existence since 1989. Quebec and seven other provinces have signed this agreement, which replaces the former Work Adjustment Training program, or WAT, more specifically targeted to the furniture industry and other traditional sectors. The proposed bill—and I point it out, because I feel it is important to do so—is designed to correct a terrible form of discrimination against urban centres with a population of over 500,000, including Montreal.

It is important to keep in mind this basic and unavoidable reality to understand what is going on in Montreal and what conditions must be met by a Montreal worker to be eligible in case of a mass lay-off—which, as you know, is a breach of contract on the employer's part—including the condition to the effect that at least 100 workers must have been laid off.

If you look at the lay-offs which have occurred in the recent past in Montreal, you see that they took place in very specific industries—textile, clothing and retail—which, of course, are not the only ones in trouble, but are nevertheless experiencing particular problems due to national and international factors.

I point this out is because between 70 and 80 per cent of these industries—textile, clothing and retail—are concentrated in Montreal. This is particularly true for the textile and clothing industries which, as you will recall, underwent a first stage of industrialization. When selecting a site for their facilities, this

being one of the location factors to use an economic expression, most textile and clothing industries chose Montreal. This is why 70 to 80 per cent of those industries are now concentrated in the Montreal region. And this is where the problem lies since, on average, textile and clothing industries have 20, 25 or 30 employees.

It is so true—and I will have the opportunity to come back to this issue later—that 78 per cent of all requests submitted last year under POWA in the Montreal area were turned down, because workers were not eligible. And because this program is particularly unsuitable to the traditional industries and harmful to Montreal workers, a consensus was reached, a rare feat in our political system, and the Liberal Party in Quebec, through Mr. Bourbeau, formerly the minister of manpower, now the minister of finance, expressed its wish for a review of the program in order to bring the minimum of 100 down to 20. The Quebec government, first under Mr. Bourassa and now under Mr. Johnson, expressed its desire that this program be modified.

The same wish was expressed by the mayor of Montreal, the major central labour bodies and all the people who are somewhat concerned by Montreal's economic development and the minimum social justice workers are entitled to expect and who have noticed some problems with POWA. In a rare show of unanimity, all parties involved called for changes to this program.

(1405)

And yet, this is the second version of POWA. A first agreement was signed in 1988 and renegotiated last year by the previous government, which was not, of course, a Liberal government. The Conservative government did not yield to all the demands of these people who know better than anybody else the real problems of Montreal's workers.

I have very concrete figures that will show to our colleagues how this POWA program is not suitable for Montreal's workers. The proof is that, in 1993-94, in the clothing industry, 75 businesses qualified, which means that their employees were eligible, and exactly 359 companies did not qualify because of the minimum of 100 workers.

Thus, there were four times more businesses that did not qualify than those that did, even if there were massive lay-offs. Four times more businesses could not ensure income support for their workers—I remind you that these workers are 55 years of age and more who have given 20, 25, 30 years of their lives to the labour force, the labour market, and their community—because of a stupid criterion which is not adapted to the situation in Montreal.

The same is true for the business sector. As you know, one of the realities of our modern economies is that the tertiary sector is becoming the main production sector and, in Montreal, according to the figures available for 1993-94, 41 commercial

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businesses were declared eligible under POWA while 139 did not qualify.

So, three times more companies and three times more workers were excluded than included. That is nonsense and, out of consideration for the workers, the situation must be corrected. I repeat, because it cannot be overemphasized, all concerned agree. It is wrong for a worker in a desperate situation, which often may have drastic consequences over which he has no control, like a massive lay-off, to have to go through an eligibility determination process. His eligibility should not be based on the size of the municipality in which he lives.

The case of Steinberg shows how absurd these criteria are. We are all familiar with this case and we remember that workers in 13 of the 28 stores that should have qualified under POWA were in fact excluded. In the case of Steinberg, there is another factor that should be mentioned, namely that we were in a situation where there were two categories of employers.

Despite the fact that Steinberg was a chain that had various stores across Quebec, you will see, Madam Speaker, how absurd the situation was regarding the eligibility under POWA and you will feel sad about it. It is a situation that has to change. So, according to the criteria used, it was possible for a person who worked in a Steinberg store in Ville d'Anjou to qualify under POWA, whereas another Steinberg employee who worked in a Montreal store could be excluded.

You did not misunderstand, Madam Speaker. It was the same corporate organization, with the same employer, the same technologies, the same collective agreement, and the same supervision system, and we ended up with a totally unacceptable situation where workers were divided into two groups, with some people being excluded and others included. That is unacceptable from the point of view of social rights.

Why? Because, once more, eligibility depends on the size of the municipality where the production unit is located. Let us take the Steinberg situation. In the case of laid-off workers in Saint-Jérôme, there had to be 40 workers eligible to POWA if individual workers were to be compensated.

(1410)

And for the same company, the same production unit, the same technology, and the same producer, if you were working for Steinberg in Longueuil, but still for the same company, the number of laid-off workers was 80 to become eligible.

An hon. member: Twenty in Ville d'Anjou.

Mr. Ménard: Twenty in Ville d'Anjou. Furthermore, we hear about an opting out agreement which reminds us a lot of the Conservative regime, characterized by nepotism, favouritism and insensitivity to workers.

This reality does not concern only Montreal. It is my duty, as the member for Hochelaga—Maisonneuve, to speak of the situation in Montreal. But I asked our colleagues in the Reform Party to come up with some figures for their provinces and I got some more figures for other provinces which have more traditional sectors and are concerned with major economic changes.

You will be surprised to hear this, but I have figures for Nova Scotia. In Nova Scotia, according to the latest figures available, ten businesses obtained their certificate of compliance for POWA and 36 were excluded, also on the basis of the number of laid-off workers.

The same thing happened in Ontario, a somewhat more dynamic region, the country's industrial heartland, where 184 lay-offs were certified in 1993-94, and the workers in 663 companies were excluded. I must remind the House that workers are eligible on a collective basis before being eligible on an individual basis.

That is to say that there is something in this program that must be reviewed. For my part, I have been speaking on that matter for a long time. You know, in politics, we develop a special interest for some matters; for me, it was POWA, because I am from a mostly working-class neighbourhood.

As a matter of fact, I made several representations to my colleagues from the Liberal Party and the Reform Party to whom I want to address my thanks for their co-operation; I think we are going to agree that some amendments are needed.

In fairness, I do not want to leave our viewers with the impression that we are the first to address this issue. MPs in the previous Parliament, particularly the Liberals when they were sitting on this side, also called for amendments to the agreement on POWA on several occasions. And if it is not against our Standing Orders, I would like to quote one of our most distinguished colleagues, the member for Saint-Léonard, that we are delighted to see participate in today's debate. I know that we share the same views on this issue and I am very pleased about that, because he also represents the Montreal region and I know he is sensitive to the reality of non-eligible workers.

In short, let me quote some of his most famous words: "Mr. Speaker, under Standing Order 36, I have the pleasure to table a petition signed by 2,657 Canadians who call upon the government to amend the regulations concerning the Program for Older Worker Adjustment.

As you know, in the metropolitan region, those employed by companies of less than 100 employees are not eligible. It is a case of discrimination—this is the term used by the hon. member for Saint-Léonard—when we know that in Canada, 98 per cent of companies are small and medium-sized firms with less than 100 employees".

What are our chances of getting his support in this very important matter for the workers of Montreal and to what extent can he have some influence within his government? I can talk in a non-partisan way because this is a question which concerns all members of Parliament. Whether we are members of the

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Reform Party, the Bloc or even the government, we all know what it means to lose one's job at 55 years of age. Disruptions can happen in our economic community over which we have no control.

At 55, after having devoted one's life to a job—but you are not of that generation, you are a young woman—workers have given 20, 25 or even 30 years to the job market. We have no right to leave these people without adequate financial protection. I see that the hon. member for Saint-Léonard is nodding in agreement.

(1415)

Such is the intention of the bill. There is nothing complicated in what we are saying, nothing original, I admit. We are saying what the Liberals said before us, what Quebecers are saying through their minister of finance, Mr. Bourbeau, and through the mayor of Montreal, and what the labour confederations are asking for. What we are saying is that Montreal's work environment does not prepare workers who could be laid off in the sectors which are more likely to be affected.

It is in this context that I ask today, innocently but with enthusiasm, the consent of the House to put the following motion. I move, seconded by the member for Bourassa:

That Bill C-243 presented in my name, be deemed read for the second time and referred to the Standing Committee on Human Resources Development.

I conclude by mentioning that I am convinced this bill must be examined by a committee. I want to let the government know that I am open-minded. I am willing to change my mind if some dimensions of the debate have escaped me. I am open-minded and I know the members are sensitive to the reality faced by Montreal workers. I am confident they will give the necessary consent in this matter.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Maheu): The House has heard the motion. Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the said motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Maheu): There is no unanimous consent.

Mr. Alfonso Gagliano (Saint-Léonard): Madam Speaker, I would like to take part in this important debate, because I find it essential, as the hon. member for Hochelaga—Maisonneuve mentioned in his speech, where he quoted one of my most famous statements—I was not aware that I was now famous—and read a petition containing more than 2,000 names. So, for information purposes and for the record, let me add that I tabled

more than 5,000 petitions concerning the Program for Older Worker Adjustment, or POWA.

For the benefit of our viewers and listeners, I will describe the program. It is intended for 55-year-old workers who lose their jobs following massive lay-offs. These last few years, God knows there have been quite a few of those. In the past, as the hon. member for Hochelaga—Maisonneuve mentioned, we had a program to assist older workers from special sectors, whether it be the textile, clothing or footwear sector. The program often allowed exceptions depending on the community or the number of the lay-offs.

After the change in government and with evolving economic conditions, the Tories abolished the program and introduced a new one involving the provinces. POWA did not target any particular industry, it included all economic sectors. However, to limit public expenditures, because there were some major economic constraints, they introduced the rule of 100 jobs for every municipality of at least 500,000 residents. If you take Montreal, the number would apply to the city of Montreal. For example, in La Salle, it would be 60 jobs, and, in Saint-Léonard, it would probably be 80. But, to my mind, for the unemployed, this has always been a kind of discrimination.

(1420)

The difference between the hon. member for Hochelaga—Maisonneuve and myself—There have been a number of meetings on the subject and we even attended some of these together, and I said this before and I say it again today, if you want to get rid of discrimination, you get rid of it across the board. If 100 is discriminatory, then 20 is just as discriminatory as 100, because where do you draw the line, Madam Speaker?

An example: 74 per cent of small businesses in Canada employ fewer than five workers, and 97 per cent employ fewer than 50. Since three quarters of all small businesses in Canada employ fewer than five workers, we would correct only 25 per cent of the discriminatory practices in this sector. As I said before, when you get rid of discrimination, you get rid of it across the board. If a practice is discriminatory, you get rid of it altogether. That is why, since October 25, with the advent of the new Liberal government I have been working with the Department of Human Resources Development to deal with all aspects of this problem. It is a social problem.

When a 55-year old worker is laid off, either in a collective lay-off or individually, it is very difficult for him to get a job. This is a social problem that has been with us since the sixties. Twice attempts were made to deal with the problem through programs which, unfortunately, failed to deliver. I am working with the minister, with the human resources development committee to which the hon. member wants to refer this bill, and our

objective is to deal with this problem once and for all through the reform of our social programs. We have young people, older workers, women and the disabled who need our help.

As we approach the 21st century, we have an economy that has changed completely, and we must deal with this through social measures that go beyond the consideration that 100 jobs are affected in a company. It is a problem because we are talking about older workers. What difference does it make whether a person works in Saint-Léonard, Ville LaSalle, Chicoutimi or Laval? That should not be a problem. We have to deal with the social issues.

At the time, I asked the hon. member to join me, with his party colleagues, so that we could all work together. All parties are represented on the Committee on Human Resources Development. When the report is coming out this fall, they want to prepare a study that includes these programs. The minister is working on this with his department. We will then be in a position to respond.

Reducing the number from 100 to 20 does not get rid of the problem. There will still be discrimination, because 74 per cent of small businesses have fewer than five employees, and more and more small businesses are being set up. We cannot depend on big companies to create jobs. We saw what happened. Like me, the hon. member is from East Montreal, and we all know what happened to the big companies in Montreal during the recession. Only small businesses will be able to create real jobs. In fact, this government is committed to creating jobs by developing small businesses, so we cannot discriminate in this area. I would urge the hon. member for Hochelaga—Maison-neuve to continue his efforts, as I continue mine, to help older workers.

We must find a system, a comprehensive solution so that everybody has a job, whether the company has ten, five, twenty or fifty employees; we all know that units are becoming increasingly smaller.

The member knows quite well that if this bill were to pass tomorrow morning, there would be just as many cases in the ridings as there are today, because the problem would still be the same. Even as members of Parliament we do not know what to say sometimes; we often see cases where they are close to the 100 threshold. I know of many instances where there are 80, even 95 employees affected in a plant which does not qualify. So if the limit is 20, what will we say when there are only 17 or 18? The discrimination will be exactly the same.

(1425)

Madam Speaker, my colleague mentioned the Steinberg case. I am well aware of that case because I met the parties involved several times here in Ottawa and in my riding. I am still working on it and I hope to solve that Steinberg problem because it is a simple matter of interpretation. We could solve it even within

Private Members' Business

the existing program. The problem is that a civil servant somewhere decided to consider different parts of the company as separate units. Steinberg was a single employer and we know it moved employees from one supermarket to another, in different municipalities. These people had to follow orders, go and work a week or a day in such or such a place. When Steinberg closed its doors they were in one store rather than another, and the choice had not been theirs.

I believe that together we could have that decision reviewed and we could bring justice to these employees. However, the general problem can only be solved with the Minister of Human Resources Development and the committees which work on the matter. As it is, we have to allow some time. Social programs are not going to be reformed every year. We are in a favourable period and we must act. I am glad we are doing this now, because I think the timing is right. We have to press on.

I urge the hon. member for Hochelaga—Maison-neuve not to give up. His bill did not get unanimous consent and could not be referred to a committee, but it is a subject that we should come back to. There is a problem in our society which has to be solved, but solved for good. As I said earlier, you do not correct a discrimination by creating another one. That discrimination has to disappear completely if we want to leave some hope to our workers, even those less than 55. Should there be some lay-offs, they should expect some compensation, even if they are young. They should be able to access a system allowing them to continue paying their mortgage, the rent, their children's tuition. Today, that security does not exist.

I congratulate the hon. member for Hochelaga—Maison-neuve and I urge him to continue his battle; he will always get my support on this. I am convinced that the reform of social programs will answer this bill.

Mr. Ménard: Madam Speaker, excuse my inexperience, I am willing to learn. We presented a motion we hoped would be votable to defer a bill and I understand that the government is not going to accept it on the basis of specific criteria which it finds discriminatory. If we were to present our proposal and say that we are committed to remove any mention of eligibility according to a specific number, be it 20 or 100, can we ask the House to reconsider the motion and vote again on it, if the member for Saint-Léonard is willing to be consistent?

You do understand my point of order, Madam Speaker. The member told me that it was not admissible because it was discriminatory. I am willing to remove the element found discriminatory, and I ask the House to reconsider the motion.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Maheu): Is there unanimous consent to amend the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

Private Members' Business

(1430)

Mr. Gagliano: Madam Speaker, the hon. member has introduced a bill. Over a month ago, he came to me and asked me to support this bill, but I told him that I could not back it in its present form. He had all the time he needed to make the necessary amendments. I think that in my speech, I was honest. I congratulated the member and encouraged him to keep at it. However, if he is only interested in politicking, then I am not biting.

I maintain that he had all the time in the world to come up with some amendments. I made it clear to him from the very beginning when he asked for my support that I could not give it to him. Now that we are debating this bill in the House and he is making his speech, he is coming back to this point. The best thing to do now is to have this debate and, if he wishes, he could introduce another bill at a later time or, as I suggested, raise the matter before the human resources committee. This would certainly help the cause of these older workers a great deal. However, if he is interested in politicking, then politicking he will get.

Mr. Duceppe: Madam Speaker, indeed we do not have any interest in politicking. If that had been the case, we would have referred to the question of social reform and mentioned the fact that some precedents do exist since the unemployment insurance formula was changed in Bill C-17 to reduce benefits. The unemployment insurance system was changed, even though social reform has not yet been finalized. Therefore, a precedent does exist.

However, in the measure—

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Maheu): I am sorry, but I think the hon. member will agree with me that—

Mr. Duceppe: Madam Speaker, I would like to finish my point of order. To the extent that we are not interested in politicking, we have just heard the hon. member for Saint-Léonard say that one of the program's provisions was discriminatory. We are prepared to support his suggestion that the discriminatory provision be removed and that the whole matter be referred to committee. This being the case, we would support the hon. member for Saint-Léonard's proposal.

Mr. Ménard: Madam Speaker, on a point of order. Let there be no mistake. I will not tolerate, and I do not expect that you will either, being accused by the hon. member for Saint-Léonard of politicking. Let me tell you—and I would like to wrap up, if I may—that I have been involved in this issue since 1989. The riding I represent is fairly disadvantaged as compared to that of the hon. member for Saint-Léonard and I find his comment uncalled for.

The real question, the one workers will remember, is: Does this government want—

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Maheu): Order! The hon. member for Saint-Léonard, on a point of order.

Mr. Gagliano: Madam Speaker, given the hon. member's lack of experience, I shall remain calm and ignore these last remarks. What I want to say however is that the chief opposition whip's remarks baffle me. He has been sitting here long enough. He should be familiar with the Standing Orders by now. If he reads the bill, he will see that there will be nothing left if my proposal is agreed to. It will become an entirely new bill.

When I said that I had stated my views, or my intentions to the hon. member the first time he had come to see me, a few months ago, to ask for my support, I meant that I had made the same objections to the bill as I did in my speech today. This bill reduces the number of jobs in a municipality with a population of 500,000 from 100 to 20 and this, retroactively. Basically, there is still discrimination.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Maheu): With all due respect, I say to the Government Whip that this is a matter for debate and not a question of privilege or a point of order.

(1435)

Mr. Duceppe: My colleague, the Government Whip, said that I have been a member long enough to be familiar with the procedure.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Maheu): I am sorry but this is not a question of privilege.

There was no unanimous consent. Unfortunately, the points you are raising have to do with the debate. This is not a question of privilege.

The hon. member for Laurier—Sainte-Marie on point of order.

Mr. Duceppe: Madam Speaker, I would like you to explain to me why wanting to set the record straight—when I am accused of not knowing the procedure despite having been a member for a number of years—is not a question of privilege.

Is it not clearly a question of privilege? I would like to know.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Maheu): In any case, it does not really relate to what the hon. member said and, I repeat, this is a matter for debate. Resuming debate.

Mr. Ménard: On a point of order, Madam Speaker.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Maheu): If it is not a point of order, the debate will resume immediately. The hon. member for Hochelaga—Maisonneuve.

Mr. Ménard: Madam Speaker, every member of this House has the right to understand your decision and I would like to understand it.

I raised a point of order about something. The hon. member for Saint-Léonard alleged that—

Private Members' Business

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Maheu): Order! Order! I repeat again that there never was unanimous consent, so we cannot return to the question you raised at first.

Mr. Duceppe: Question of privilege!

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Maheu): On a question of privilege, the hon. member for Laurier—Sainte-Marie.

Mr. Duceppe: Madam Speaker, when I said that the member for Saint-Léonard had said that I should know the procedure since I have sat here for several years, you told me that he did not say that. Could you tell me what he said?

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Maheu): On this point, we will check the blues when they come out and I will get back to you on it.

[English]

Mr. Dale Johnston (Wetaskiwin): Madam Speaker, I am pleased to address this bill. It gives me an opportunity to discuss some of the serious unemployment problems in Canada and to determine if the government's response has been adequate and propose some constructive alternatives.

I would like to start by saying that the hon. member for Hochelaga—Maisonneuve has proposed some fairly significant changes to the government's older worker adjustment program, one of which if passed would cost millions of dollars more and require the renegotiation of six federal-provincial agreements.

As well intentioned as this bill is, I think the consequences and the cost of implementing this bill have not been considered as long and as hard as they would need to be.

This bill would dramatically change the eligibility rules for the program for older worker adjustment, otherwise known as POWA. Section 5.1 of the Department of Labour Act gives the minister the authority to enter into agreements with provincial governments for the purpose of making income assistance payments to older workers between the ages of 55 and 65. Workers are eligible only if they have been affected by major permanent lay-offs and have exhausted their UI insurance benefits.

The federal government has entered into POWA agreements with six provinces: Newfoundland, Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, Quebec, Ontario and British Columbia. As there is a limited amount of money allocated to POWA agreements, the government establishes in each agreement a formula for determining what it considers to be a major layoff. The formula is based on the size of the city or community, the size of the company and is different in each federal-provincial agreement.

(1440)

Here is an example of the formula used in a Quebec POWA agreement. In a community, let us say, of a million people you would require a number of employees to equal 100. If your community or city has 165,000 people then you need only 80 employees to qualify under a POWA agreement. As the size of the community decreases so does the number of employees.

Just to illustrate this, in a community of 50,000 people you would require 50 employees to qualify. In a community of 17,000 or fewer you would require 20 employees to qualify under this program.

Eligibility for POWA assistance is determined for each specific mass layoff and then for the individual employee affected by the layoff. Interestingly, between April 1, 1992 and December 23, 1993, 380 layoffs in the six provinces were designated under this program. Annuities were purchased for 3,500 older workers for a total cost of \$104 million to the federal government and some \$39 million to the provincial governments.

Officials have told us that the federal contributions to POWA have been capped at \$50 million and estimates for 1994-95 confirm that the government will spend \$50 million on POWA.

The hon. member is proposing in this bill to change this program significantly with huge financial implications and creating a potential problem in the area of federal-provincial relations. This bill would remove the discretion the minister has in negotiating federal-provincial agreements. Instead of leaving the determination and eligibility for POWA based on the size of the community, impact on the community, type of industry, size of the company and the number of employees affected, this bill would require both federal and provincial governments to include all companies with 20 or more employees.

This member's office has confirmed that it has no way of knowing how many companies or how many employees would become eligible for coverage under POWA as a result of the changes proposed by this bill.

The member is asking Canadian taxpayers to write a blank cheque.

How could anyone in this House support this bill not knowing how much it is likely to cost the federal government? Not only would this bill require the federal government to assume new and unknown program cuts, which would surely be in the tens of millions of dollars, the bill would also require that the province increase its contribution to the program for older workers adjustment.

Second, I would point out in regard to this bill in clause 5.1 that the amendment would immediately rescind all current federal-provincial agreements and require the Minister of Human Resources to renegotiate each one of them.

Private Members' Business

What would this mean for federal-provincial relations? What would this mean for older workers who are already receiving assistance under the POWA program?

This bill clearly creates more problems than it solves.

The Reform Party would like to thank the hon. member for introducing this bill. While we cannot support it, it is always enlightening to investigate a government program and see how the problems were addressed in the past, what was wrong with the approach and possibly how it could be done better in the future.

When we look at the program for older worker adjustment, we see a government using its powers to design a discriminatory program which supports older workers, subject to a completely arbitrary formula based on the size of the community, type of industry, the size of the company, and the age and employment status of the employee.

This means if I were a worker aged 59 living in Montreal, laid off from a company with more than 100 employees in the textile industry and had just used up the last of my unemployment insurance benefits, I would be eligible for assistance under POWA.

(1445)

On the other hand, if I were a 59 year old Montrealer laid off from a company with 90 employees, not 100, in the textile industry and had just exhausted my UI benefits I would not be eligible for assistance under POWA.

While I admire the government's intent to keep the cost of POWA capped at \$50 million, I am frankly amazed that the government would implement a program that is this discriminatory.

What about older workers who are in exactly the same boat but did not work for the right size of company or a specified industry? What about all the older workers who are in the same or worse circumstances because they worked for themselves all their lives? No one is coming around to them with a guaranteed annual income.

I believe that if the government is going to create a program for older workers who have exhausted their UI benefits and have little opportunity for employment, then it had better include all older workers, not just a few selected workers in a few selected industries in a few selected provinces.

While we may sympathize with the plight of older unemployed workers and while the intentions of the government and my hon. friend who introduced the bill are entirely noble, the fact is that many Canadians are facing tough times and would like the government to buy them an annuity until they reach age 65.

What would happen to these older workers if there were no pilot program? Many of them would find work eventually or

would find work elsewhere. A number of them would rely on their families for help until they did find work. Unfortunately some may have to resort to welfare.

In my opinion, Canada is not short of safety nets. In fact, I believe we have too many. The program for older worker adjustments is an illustration of this point.

Specific groups of people who are hard pressed lobbied the government for help and the government, in a legitimate desire to help, creates yet another social program, another income supplement program.

In our view, Canada needs only one income supplement program and it should be administered through the income tax system. How much money would be saved by using this Reform approach? We say billions.

The government's social programs are an overlapping, confusing mess that few politicians and few Canadians understand. It is time to bring some common sense back to our social programs and to get our social spending under control. This is why I am here in Ottawa and I intend to do my best to do just that.

Let me summarize once more why we cannot support the measures in the bill. The bill changes the eligibility criteria for POWA programs, increasing the number of persons eligible for the benefit and as a result would dramatically increase costs both for the provincial and the federal governments.

Reformers were sent to Ottawa to save the taxpayer money not to find new ways to spend it.

The bill would remove the discretion that the minister has to negotiate provincial-federal agreements. While that is not necessarily all bad, it may not be in the best interest of the Canadian taxpayer.

The bill would require the government to immediately rescind and renegotiate six federal-provincial agreements. This would likely cause a problem not only in the area of inter-governmental relations but for older workers now and in the future.

I understand the member's motivation for presenting the bill. I am sure he has the best interest of the older laid-off workers in his constituency at heart and I commend him for that, but has he taken into consideration fully the Canadian taxpayer? What we really need is a complete overhaul of our social programs.

My colleagues across the way have set for themselves the onerous task of reducing the federal deficit to 3 per cent of gross domestic product in three years' time while maintaining an acceptable level of social security.

We still spend \$70 billion a year on these programs, half of all the money taken in. If the Liberal government is going to reach the target it has set for itself, it has no alternative but to reduce program spending, not increase it.

Private Members' Business

We feel that if there is a problem for all older, laid-off workers, whether they work in a big company, a small company or for themselves, then the government should not be selective in which older workers qualify for assistance.

(1450)

This having been said, we think the social safety net for older workers is sufficient and there is no need for POWA. To this end we will be making a proposal to eliminate the program through our standing committee under section 81(7).

Mr. Andy Scott (Fredericton—York—Sunbury): Madam Speaker, I welcome the opportunity to speak to the bill proposed by the member from Hochelaga—Maisonneuve because it brings to the attention of the House the very difficult adjustment problems faced by laid-off older workers.

These problems have caused the government to arrange a cost shared program to offer assistance for older workers who have been involved in major layoffs and this program has been in place since 1988.

Under the program, the federal and provincial governments have purchased annuities to provide income assistance to 9,000 older workers. The federal government has contributed \$254 million, the provincial governments, \$109 million as their respective portion of cost.

The effect of the bill proposed by the hon. member from Hochelaga—Maisonneuve will be to change one of the major criteria of the program for older workers adjustment and to place that change into the Department of Labour Act.

At present, the program criteria are contained in the cost shared framework agreements negotiated and signed by the federal government and the participating provinces. The bill would make one of the layoff designation criteria part of the law. Specifically, the bill would allow any layoff involving at least 20 employed workers to be eligible under the program. This bill would significantly change one of the fundamental concepts behind and the criteria for eligibility in the program for older worker adjustment.

Presently, to be eligible under the program, a layoff is considered relative to the size of the community. This consideration is directly related to the degree of difficulty that laid off older workers will face finding new employment. The more laid off workers with similar skills, the greater the competition for jobs and the degree of difficulty in finding a job also depends on the size of the labour market.

Under the current federal-provincial framework agreements that govern eligibility at least 20 workers must be laid off in communities with a population of 10,000 or less and at least 100

laid off in communities with a population of more than half a million. There are various categories in between.

I have no difficulty with proposals to change the numbers involved. In fact, the lower numbers might even be an improvement, but a graduated entry requirement is a way of measuring both the hardship faced by the laid off workers in finding re-employment and the disruption to the community caused by the layoff.

On the other hand, to establish in law a universal minimum would mean that practically all layoffs would need to be covered, thereby removing the targeted measures of limited prospects for re-employment and significant economic disruption in a region. The effect would be to change the fundamental program criteria and that without any consultation with our provincial partners.

The bill is well intentioned and it would help more older workers. However, I am concerned that if enacted it could potentially cost the federal and provincial governments billions of dollars. As we know, during times of scarce resources the measurement of targeting mechanisms contained in present legislation could be overwhelmed by sheer volume and drive cash strapped governments out of the program. That would not help unemployed workers.

Where in the event that criteria were changed without commensurate funding increases, the advantage that smaller communities have now because of the graduated entry requirements would result in small communities being left behind.

The government recognizes the needs of unemployed older workers and has programs in place to help those in greatest difficulty. Improvements need to be made to address the needs of older workers and that is being done in the social policy review.

I would bring to the attention of the House a program that was instituted between the federal government and the province of New Brunswick called Jobs Corps, where older workers are allowed to earn up to \$1,000 a month for a year and in return would work for 26 weeks. They could earn up to \$8,000 on top of that without penalty to the original \$12,000.

The government recognizes the need to help older workers who are trying to move in a direction of active programming to decrease the potential for dependency and away from passive programs.

I appreciate the opportunity to speak to the member's motion. I encourage the member to participate in the social policy review process and welcome consideration of all of his ideas.

[Translation]

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Maheu): I accept the point of order, but the time allowed for Private Members' Business has now expired.

Private Members' Business

Is there unanimous consent of the House to hear a point of order?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Mr. Nunez: Madam Speaker, I request the unanimous consent of the House to pursue the debate. There are two members waiting for their turn to speak. It should not take too long. This is an extremely important debate. Normally, a Bloc Quebecois member should have spoken before a Liberal Party member. I am a bit confused.

[*English*]

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Maheu): Is there unanimous consent to extend private members' hour?

Some hon. members: No.

The Acting Speaker (Mrs. Maheu): The time provided for the consideration of private members' business has now expired. Pursuant to Standing Order 96(1), the order is dropped from the Order Paper.

It being 2.55 p.m., pursuant to order made Friday, May 6, 1994, the House stands adjourned until Monday at 2 p.m.

(The House adjourned at 2.54 p.m.)

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