



CANADA

House of Commons Debates

VOLUME 135 • NUMBER 090 • 1st SESSION • 36th PARLIAMENT

OFFICIAL REPORT
(HANSARD)

Wednesday, April 22, 1998

Speaker: The Honourable Gilbert Parent

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HOUSE OF COMMONS

Wednesday, April 22, 1998

The House met at 2 p.m.

Prayers

• (1400)

[*English*]

The Speaker: As is our practice on Wednesdays, we will now sing O Canada, and we will be led by the hon. member for Winnipeg—Transcona.

[*Editor's Note: Members sang the national anthem*]

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

[*English*]

HILLCREST SCHOOL REUNION

Mr. Ovid L. Jackson (Bruce—Grey, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to offer my congratulations to Hillcrest School in my riding of Bruce—Grey which will be celebrating its 50th anniversary reunion this weekend in Owen Sound.

Since 1948 Hillcrest has provided primary and junior high school education in the Owen Sound area. It has grown from a building housing 150 primary students to a large junior high school of 700 students and a staff of 60.

Reunions are always full of memories. Returning staff and students will relive the thrill of the first day, remember obstacles they had to overcome and meet with friends. They will all get together to think about the dreams they had in the past and the future they will have together.

As both the present and past students assemble at Hillcrest this weekend to celebrate I offer them my best wishes and congratulations. I know that this weekend will be full of youthful memories, old friends and good times.

B.C. DISASTER VICTIMS

Mr. Paul Forseth (New Westminster—Coquitlam—Burnaby, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, there is a sea of blue in B.C.'s lower mainland and it has nothing to do with the Pacific Ocean.

Hundreds of large blue tarps are hanging from condominiums in a last ditch attempt to protect properties from extensive water damage during repairs due to second-rate building practices. The Condominium Owners Association of British Columbia estimates the repair costs to be in the neighbourhood of \$1 billion—similar to Canada's other recent natural disasters.

These disaster victims are looking for help now. It is a serious crisis and not even the Minister of National Revenue, whose own constituents are many of the troubled condo owners, has spoken a word about it in this House.

The minister has the power to lend a hand: allow owners to use RRSP funds, make interest payments on loans deductible, or even permit emergency repairs to be GST exempt.

Let us have a B.C. minister finally do something for B.C.

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THOMAS D'ARCY MCGEE

Mr. Joe McGuire (Egmont, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as hon. members are aware, on April 7, 1868 a remarkable father of Confederation was assassinated. However, 130 years later the legacy of Thomas D'Arcy McGee is symbolized by the goals that we as parliamentarians strive to achieve.

McGee's important contributions reflect his Irish descendancy, defined by struggle and suffering, and his compassionate conscience which assisted in the development of the Canadian economic, social and political nature we have inherited.

McGee's work with immigrants led him into the political arena with a Montreal seat in the House of Assembly of the Canadas in 1857. He was responsible as a Reform MLA for legislating progressive social and health conditions and for providing a stable foundation for the Canadian fabric.

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It was also his participation in the Confederation debates that fostered his historical legacy as a compassionate visionary, encompassing an equitable partnership between two peoples which would result in what he called a new nationality.

McGee saw Canada as a nation that would bridge differences—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke.

* * *

CANADIAN SPECIAL OLYMPICS

Mr. Hec Clouthier (Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Canadian Special Olympics is the national sports organization that provides sport training and competition opportunities for athletes who are mentally challenged.

Today the Canadian Special Olympics serves 20,000 athletes through the efforts of 8,000 volunteers. There are offices in every province and the two territories where year-round training occurs.

The Canadian Special Olympics is endorsed by the Canadian Olympic Association. The national winter games will be held from January 25 to January 30 in the year 2000. Canada's capital region's bid for these games will be presented to the Canada Special Olympics on April 27, 1998. This bid, if successful, will be integrated into the Ottawa 2000 millennium celebrations.

On behalf of all citizens of the great riding of Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke I endorse this bid.

Congratulations to my friend and colleague the member for Ottawa—Vanier who has been superlative—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Vancouver Kingsway.

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CHINESE BENEVOLENT ASSOCIATION

Ms. Sophia Leung (Vancouver Kingsway, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, last week the Chinese Benevolent Association which represents over 40 organizations from Vancouver presented me with a petition signed by over 5,000 residents of Vancouver. They oppose the language requirement contained in the report "Not Just Numbers" presently being considered by the Department of Citizenship and Immigration. I will be presenting their concerns to the minister in the near future.

• (1405)

The people of Vancouver want their concerns taken into account. They have a right to be heard.

The minister has proven that Canadians have a voice in shaping our government policy. I have every confidence that the government will maintain an immigration policy based on fairness and

openness. Why? Because the government cares about the views of Canadians.

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YOUNG OFFENDERS ACT

Mr. Myron Thompson (Wild Rose, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, in December 1997 we heard the justice minister say that she was meeting her provincial counterparts in Montreal to discuss changes to the YOA and she would get back to us.

In February 1998 she was still in consultation, but she would get back to us.

This week she tells us that she will respond in a timely fashion. I guess that means she will get back to us.

What we need today is a commitment from the justice minister to announce changes to the YOA before we recess this summer. I only hope that she will give us that commitment.

It seems all we get are words, words, words and no action. For me everything boils down to either you cannot do something or you will not. It is obvious that she either cannot make these changes to the YOA or she will not. I wonder which it is.

I hope when the senior minister from Alberta returns to her riding she can explain to her constituents and the rest of Alberta why her bleeding heart eastern colleagues have torpedoed her law and order.

Words are not enough to pacify Albertans. We are people of action, especially in terms of the safety of our children and grandchildren.

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[Translation]

NAGANO OLYMPIC GAMES MEDALISTS

Mr. Jacques Saada (Brossard—La Prairie, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, at a luncheon today, the Prime Minister paid special tribute to Canada's Olympic and Paralympic medalists.

He honoured them on behalf of all the people of Canada, drawing attention to the contributions of the athletes and all those supporting them.

We cannot fully imagine all the sacrifices and all the efforts expended by these athletes in bringing these honours to our country. I wish to offer them my humble and sincere thanks.

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[English]

CANADIAN PARALYMPIC ATHLETES

Mr. Joe Jordan (Leeds—Grenville, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is a great honour to rise in the House today to pay tribute to all the

athletes from Canada who participated in the Paralympic games this past winter in Nagano, Japan.

We have in our presence today some of these world-class athletes, athletes who are dedicated to excellence in their sport as demonstrated through their commitment to training and achieving results. The results have been impressive.

This was Canada's best ever showing at the Paralympic games as we came away with one gold, nine silver and five bronze medals.

I would like to recognize the tremendous sacrifices made by all our athletes and the support that is given to them by their families, coaches, trainers, friends, as well as the financial contributions of over 20,000 donors. All these people played a big part in the theme of the Paralympic games which was "Friendship and Warmth".

I ask my fellow members of parliament to join me in congratulating our very own Canadian Paralympic athletes and medal winners.

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[Translation]

INTERNATIONAL EARTH DAY

Mr. Bernard Bigras (Rosemont, BQ): Mr. Speaker, today is Earth Day, which offers us the opportunity to reflect on our relationship with the environment.

In recent generations, the human race's ability to modify the world ecosystem has increased in a spectacular way, because of our exploding population and our technological progress. World economic activity, for instance, is 20 times what it was in 1900. Consequently, many human activities surpass our planet's ability to replenish its resources.

A short-sighted view will not enable us to solve these problems. We need to start to again incorporate environmental considerations with our day to day decisions as individuals, managers and legislators. It is possible for economic development to go hand in hand with respect for the environment.

International Earth Day reminds us that there is no time to waste in making the still theoretical concept of sustainable development a concrete reality.

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[English]

SASKATCHEWAN PARTY

Mr. Jason Kenney (Calgary Southeast, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, this week marked a fresh start for the people of Saskatchewan and the beginning of the end of the NDP stranglehold on that great province. That is because a new free-enterprise coalition was born

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with the election of Elwin Hermanson to the leadership of the Saskatchewan Party on Monday.

As a distinguished former member of this place, a former House leader and one of the founding members of the Reform movement, Elwin is a man of integrity who will help to bring new hope to the people of Saskatchewan, especially the young people who have for too long been driven out of that province by the tax and spend government-knows-best ideology of the NDP.

• (1410)

Elwin's leadership in the Saskatchewan Party is concrete evidence that common sense Canadians can put aside their partisan differences to advance a united alternative based on fiscal responsibility, strong families and democratic reforms.

On behalf of all members of this House, we extend our best wishes to the new leader of the opposition and the next premier of Saskatchewan, Elwin Hermanson.

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[Translation]

INTERNATIONAL EARTH DAY

Mr. Nick Discepola (Vaudreuil—Soulanges, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Earth Day represents an important time for all societies in the world, as we direct our planet toward an enhanced quality of life, free of wars, injustice and violence.

We all share values of peace and sharing, although these remain dreams rather than realities for many countries in the world.

If we can contribute, even in the most modest of ways, to raising the awareness of all societies in the world to the need to show tolerance, unity and generosity, Canada will be shouldering at least some of its responsibilities.

Canada is involved on an ongoing basis with bringing peoples together. Through its presence in international institutions and through its embassies, the Canadian government has historically shown its desire for peace and its confidence in humankind.

We must wish collectively for Canada to continue this mission it has undertaken in partnership with all the other countries that share our values of compassion, openness, and generosity toward—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Winnipeg—Transcona.

* * *

GLOBALIZATION

Mr. Bill Blaikie (Winnipeg—Transcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the members of the New Democratic Party understand the frustration of the young member of the Bloc Québécois. Many young people across Canada share his frustration. They see the need to deal immediately with the social problems caused by globalization. They are asking a very important question, one that the NDP

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keeps asking day in and day out: Do we want a society where the interests of a minority of elite people take precedence over the well-being of the community?

The Bloc Québécois does little to address these issues. In fact, the Bloc has joined the Reformers and Conservatives in supporting the position of the Liberals on the MIA, as they did before on free trade.

[English]

Globalization is all about sovereignty and the erosion of the power of all governments—provincial, federal, federalist, separatist—to act in the public interest. The NDP urges all those who are concerned about sovereignty to engage in the real debate about sovereignty.

We call on social democrats and other progressive—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Mount Royal.

* * *

YOM HASHOAH

Hon. Sheila Finestone (Mount Royal, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, today is Yom Hashoah, a worldwide day of remembrance that commemorates one of the greatest tragedies of our century, the Holocaust.

On this day we pay respect, with the survivors, as we remember the six million people who were murdered in the ultimate affront to democracy, human rights and human lives.

From the ashes of the concentration camps rose the democratic state of Israel which will soon celebrate its 50th anniversary with just pride and honour.

Jointly we mark the 50th anniversary of the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights, a worldwide recognition of the fact that all people by virtue of their humanity possess the right to life and dignity.

Unfortunately, such atrocities continue to plague mankind which we must bring to closure. We must use more effectively the UN tools such as peacekeeping and peacemaking forces and the rule of international law so that all citizens are able to live in peace amongst themselves and amongst the world family of nations.

* * *

GUYSBOROUGH COUNTY

Mr. Peter MacKay (Pictou—Antigonish—Guysborough, PC): Mr. Speaker, fishing in Guysborough County can be traced back to the Basque as early as 1504. Yet as we enter the next millennium this important industry has fallen upon tough times.

Today a delegation from my Nova Scotia riding became the second group from Guysborough County this month to come to Ottawa to discuss their concerns with the deputy minister of fisheries.

Two weeks ago representatives from the Canso Trawlerman's co-op and Seafreez in Canso, and today ACS Trading in the town of Mulgrave, arrived to request shrimp quota. Both groups have realistic, community based proposals to modernize the fisheries and create jobs in two of the poorest areas of Canada. Both proposals are supported by the private sector, the public, municipal leaders and the local Liberal MLA.

These proposals are consistent with the will to Canadianize the industry and to give Nova Scotia a fair share of the quotas.

On behalf of the men and women of these constituencies whose livelihoods depend on the federal government's commitment to work with them and for them, I urge the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans to give both proposals his full support and approval.

* * *

• (1415)

[Translation]

NAGANO OLYMPIC GAMES MEDALISTS

Mrs. Suzanne Tremblay (Rimouski—Mitis, BQ): Mr. Speaker, on behalf of the Bloc Québécois, I would like to welcome the Canadian and Quebec medal winners at the 18th Winter Olympic Games and 7th Winter Paralympic Games, which were held in Nagano.

After several years of effort, these athletes have seen their dream come true; they performed remarkably.

Today, I salute their courage and determination. I thank them for their brilliant performance. Whether they brought a medal home or not, they were already winners as far as we were concerned.

Dear Olympians, you are outstanding models and a great source of inspiration for all young people in this country. We are very proud of you. Congratulations on your participation in these Olympic Games. You have successfully risen to this great challenge.

ORAL QUESTION PERIOD

[English]

HEPATITIS C

Mr. Preston Manning (Leader of the Opposition, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, enough is enough. The House has heard nothing but excuses from the health minister for his failure to compensate the victims of hepatitis C. He provides neither leadership nor direction on this issue. Nor does he show compassion.

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Tomorrow the Reform Party will therefore introduce the following motion:

That this House urge the government to act on the recommendation of Justice Horace Krever to compensate all victims who contracted hepatitis C from tainted blood.

Will the Prime Minister call upon—

The Speaker: The Right Hon. Prime Minister.

Right Hon. Jean Chrétien (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, for many days we have repeated that we have taken action on that. We have done it in collaboration with all other governments in the country. People have looked at this problem and we have met our obligation.

On April 6, on behalf of all the provincial health ministers, Clay Serby said:

As health ministers from every province, we worked together to reach a consensus on this very difficult issue. This was not an easy decision to reach. This is a very complex issue and we have come up with an approach that is national in scope, fair and—

The Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Mr. Preston Manning (Leader of the Opposition, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, the issue was whether the Prime Minister would call off the whips and allow his members to have a free vote on that motion.

We know the Prime Minister's backbenchers are profoundly dissatisfied with the health minister's position. They simply cannot justify his lack of compassion and his lack of leadership back home.

Sacrificing a single health minister is one thing, but will the Prime Minister really force every Liberal backbencher to vote against these victims too?

Right Hon. Jean Chrétien (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as prime minister and leader of this party I have given more freedom to members on free votes. We get up on free votes and the Reform Party gets up at the same time. The same people who were asking for free votes never have free votes.

This is a matter of confidence in the government because it is a decision made by this government and all other governments of Canada. We do not want to try to score political points. It is the first time. He always comes with that. He should come first with freedom of votes on his side.

Mr. Preston Manning (Leader of the Opposition, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, the one area where the Prime Minister has supported free votes in the past has been on moral issues. This is an issue of right and wrong. It is a moral issue. It is morally wrong to abandon the sick. It is even worse for the health minister to abandon the sick when it was government negligence that made them sick in the first place.

Will the Prime Minister call off the whips and allow his backbenchers to vote freely on this motion tomorrow?

Some hon. members: Hear, hear.

Right Hon. Jean Chrétien (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am happy they are all relying on their leader. We were afraid of losing him. I will quote the minister of health from one of the provinces.

[Translation]

Jean Rochon, Quebec's health minister, said "Compensating those who contracted the disease before 1986 would raise a problem of basic fairness. If these people were compensated, the door would have to be opened for other cases, others who had suffered complications as the result of a health or surgical procedure. This is another issue, in no way related to the agreement, the—"

The Speaker: I am sorry to interrupt, but I must now give the floor to the hon. member for Wanuskewin.

• (1420)

[English]

Mr. Maurice Vellacott (Wanuskewin, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, it is some consolation to be in collaboration with others to deny justice to victims in our country.

The Canadian public happens to disagree with the Minister of Health, as do all the opposition parties and his Liberal colleagues, and he knows it.

Hepatitis C victims were protesting on the lawn of Parliament Hill on Monday. Thousands of Canadians will be on their phones over the weekend asking their members of parliament to do the right thing.

Why does the health minister not hustle back to his office, work the phones and come up with a plan to compensate all hepatitis C victims before the vote next Tuesday? Why wait for the vote?

Hon. Allan Rock (Minister of Health, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, in many ways the easiest thing to have done would have been to write a cheque and pay cash to everybody. In fact one of the reasons we get into public life is that we want to help others, particularly the sick and the vulnerable.

At the end of the day those who are in government, those who have positions of responsibility, must make tough decisions, must make responsible decisions about where cash payments should be made to those who are harmed through the public system.

On this issue and in this instance we see every government in the country in a remarkable display of unanimity coming down on one side—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Wanuskewin.

Mr. Maurice Vellacott (Wanuskewin, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, I guess that is his choice if he wants to go down with a dozen other people on this issue, but the Canadian public and hepatitis C victims are watching and waiting for the Liberal government to

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come up with some different lines than should have, could have and would have. It sounds like a cracked record.

Speaking of cracked records, I appeal to the minister. Why create unnecessary cracks and division within his own caucus and his own cabinet? Why will the health minister not do the right thing and go back to the drawing board to figure out how he can compensate all victims of hepatitis C? Then he could enjoy a good weekend with a clear conscience. Why wait for a vote on this Tuesday?

Hon. Allan Rock (Minister of Health, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the member speaks as though this was the unilateral act of one government. All governments took part in this. In fact Progressive Conservative governments in Prince Edward Island, Ontario, Manitoba and Alberta all took part in this agreement.

We are paying \$1.1 billion to 22,000 victims of hepatitis C. Is the hon. member suggesting we pay cash to all those who are affected by adverse reactions to vaccines? Is he suggesting we pay cash compensation to all those who have outcomes in the health system which reflect the risks? I think not.

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[Translation]

BUDGET SURPLUS

Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, during the first eleven months of fiscal year 1997-98, the government pocketed an extra \$4.1 billion, having forecast a \$17 billion deficit for that same period. This is a slight difference of \$21 billion, which could rise even higher when the end-of-year corrections come out this fall.

Is the Prime Minister aware that his massive cuts in transfer payments have caused a major imbalance in the Canadian federation, that the provinces are short of funds, do not have the money to provide basic services, while the federal government has more than it needs to fulfill its own mandate?

Right Hon. Jean Chrétien (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we have succeeded in balancing the government's books and we are very proud to have done so.

As for provincial transfers, we have cut the provinces less than they have cut in services.

When account is taken of the increase in transfer payments, the increase in provincial revenues because of tax points, and the reduction in provincial interest payments because interest rates have gone down, the difference between what the Canadian government gave to the Province of Quebec and what the province is now receiving is less than the province cut municipalities.

Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the government saved money on the backs of the provinces, on the backs of the most disadvantaged, on the backs of the ill and the unemployed. That is how it saved money.

Is the fact that the federal government has much more money than it needs to carry out its own mandate not proof that it is interfering, and that this is the opportunity it was waiting for to interfere in areas of jurisdiction where it has no business, areas of jurisdiction belonging to Quebec and the provinces?

Right Hon. Jean Chrétien (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is very clear proof that we have provided the Canadian people with very good government.

• (1425)

Mr. Yvan Loubier (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot, BQ): Mr. Speaker, we are headed from a \$17 billion deficit to a \$4 billion surplus.

This means that the government could have balanced the budget this year even if it had not cut transfers to the provinces by \$3 billion in 1997-98.

My question is for the Prime Minister. Does he not understand that the only fair thing to do is to put the surplus back where it came from, in provincial coffers to be used for health, education and social services, and in the pockets of taxpayers, who are being taxed to death?

Right Hon. Jean Chrétien (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, if the member had listened to my reply, instead of reading a prepared question, he would have understood that, when everything is factored in, the net cuts to provincial governments, Quebec in particular, total \$500 million, which is less than what the province is cutting from municipalities.

I do not blame them. They were forced to make cuts. We were forced to make cuts. Today, however, the economy is in much better shape. We have the lowest interest rates in many years; we have a balanced budget, and today we heard that—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot.

Mr. Yvan Loubier (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I listened to the Prime Minister, but he is not telling the whole truth. The Government of Quebec was robbed of \$11 billion, which was needed for welfare and education, as well as health. That is the fact of the matter.

And is it not the government's responsibility to help with some of the damage by giving back what it lifted from the provinces?

Right Hon. Jean Chrétien (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I do not think there was a question. But I can tell him that what he said is incorrect.

I have just said that the net difference is \$500 million with respect to the level of contributions made by the federal government in 1993-94.

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[English]

FISHERIES

Ms. Alexa McDonough (Halifax, NDP): Mr. Speaker, mismanagement has led to disaster in the east coast fishery, threatening to destroy an ecosystem, an economy and an entire culture. The human and financial costs are staggering.

Will the Prime Minister use the occasion of Earth Day to admit that federal mismanagement was the principal cause of this catastrophe? Will he finally respond to the December 12, 1997 pleadings of all five eastern premiers to immediately establish an Atlantic groundfish program successor to TAGS?

Hon. David Anderson (Minister of Fisheries and Oceans, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I think the issue of government responsibility for the cod collapse is well illustrated at pages 380 and on in a book by John Crosbie, a former minister of fisheries in the House.

He outlined as minister of fisheries the advice he received from the department which was rejected for political reasons at the time over a period of some four years.

The hon. member may wish to reinterpret history as she will, but if she looks at that book, if she looks at other reports that have been put forward and other books written, she will see that this is not the simplest of problems. It is a complex problem. To have the cod stock recover—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Halifax.

Ms. Alexa McDonough (Halifax, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister knows that federal environmental mismanagement and his government's woeful response to this catastrophe keeps tens of thousands of east coast families in crisis.

An all party committee from Newfoundland and Labrador is here today in Ottawa following up on the all premiers' letter in December pleading with Ottawa to recognize that we are dealing with a long term problem that requires a long term solution.

Will the Prime Minister ease the suffering caused by this tragedy and pledge a comprehensive response sensitive to the particular needs and conditions of coastal communities?

Right Hon. Jean Chrétien (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I hope the hon. leader of the fourth party will realize that when we formed the government at a time when we had the biggest deficit in Canadian history, we introduced a program to solve the problems that were created before we formed the government.

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We had a program for five years at a time when it was most difficult to have a new program. At that time everybody agreed that a five year program was a very generous long term program.

The problem is not resolved yet and the government is looking to see what can be done from thereon. I want to say—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Saint John.

* * *

• (1430)

HEPATITIS C

Mrs. Elsie Wayne (Saint John, PC): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Health has stated that he is concerned about the integrity of the health care system. It is not the integrity of the health care system that is in question. It is the integrity of this government and the minister which are in question because the compensation being offered to some hepatitis C victims is not the compensation package that the minister promised.

Will the minister do the right thing today and commit to compensating all hepatitis C victims who were infected through no fault of their own?

Hon. Allan Rock (Minister of Health, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the member refers to this government but she must also refer to the provincial governments who have taken the same position on the basis of public policy, Tory governments, her own party in Prince Edward Island, her own party in Ontario, Manitoba, Alberta.

Just last week Canadian researchers disclosed that thousands of people lose their lives every year because they use prescription drugs as directed but have adverse consequences. Is the member suggesting we pay cash compensation to the estates of all those victims? The implications of that approach for the health system are serious—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Saint John.

Mrs. Elsie Wayne (Saint John, PC): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Health cannot continue to hide behind other governments. Instead he must take a leadership role. There is nothing wrong with anyone in this House who has made a decision standing up and saying "we have made the wrong decision, we are going to correct it".

If we measure the health minister's words carefully we will conclude the real reason the government will not compensate all the victims of hepatitis C is money. The government wasted half a billion dollars on a botched helicopter deal, three-quarters of a billion dollars on Pearson airport and the list goes on. If money was found for these deals, why is the minister denying compensation to all of the innocent victims?

Hon. Allan Rock (Minister of Health, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as I have made clear, when confronted with a situation where there are people harmed by risks inherent in the medical system, govern-

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ments have to choose. Part of leadership on the part of the government is making tough decisions to protect the long term sustainability of the health care system.

This is the age of the class action. It is the age of claims against governments. Just last week we were sued in a class action by those who claimed that mercury fillings are causing health risks. Is the member suggesting the government should make cash payments to all those who have claims arising from the system?

* * *

FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Mr. Chuck Strahl (Fraser Valley, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister seems to be all over the map when it comes to human rights. On his trip to Cuba he refuses to raise the issue of human rights abuse publicly. Now even though the red book says that foreign aid should be linked to human rights abuses his CIDA minister is talking about giving aid to Burma, one of the most repressive regimes in the world.

Will the Prime Minister stand up today and publicly tell his minister that we are not going to give Canadian government aid to Burma or any country like it?

Hon. Diane Marleau (Minister for International Cooperation and Minister responsible for Francophonie, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Canada's policy on Myanmar, by the way that is the name of the country now, has not changed. That being said, we always review the situation and if the country and the government is willing to show some movement on human rights and good governance, we would be happy to look at resuming our programs.

Mr. Chuck Strahl (Fraser Valley, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, rather than a geography lesson perhaps the minister should look at human rights abuse for a change and treat it seriously.

Here is the situation. The Minister of Foreign Affairs imposed sanctions last year because the Burmese government was one of the worst human rights abusers in the entire world. Now the minister says we are going to give government aid.

Will the Prime Minister stand up and say that this is all over, that that government is the wrong kind of government, that we are not going to support it and there will be no Canadian government aid going to the Burmese?

Right Hon. Jean Chrétien (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I just want to correct a few statements.

The minister said there is nothing going there at all. She just said that. In terms of human rights, we are the government which is engaged in Cuba. I made a public statement, and it was in the paper this morning, that I would raise it publicly. I have already raised it privately with the Government of Cuba. I will do it publicly and

privately. Canada will be a leader there, as we have been in other situations.

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[Translation]

EMPLOYMENT INSURANCE

Mr. Paul Crête (Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup—Témiscouata—Les Basques, BQ): Mr. Speaker, again this morning Statistics Canada figures indicate that an increasingly small proportion of unemployed people are receiving employment insurance.

Last February, fewer than 41% of the unemployed could draw benefits.

• (1435)

In light of this morning's disturbing statistics, does the minister, who claimed to be concerned about this, not see them as a very clear indication that his employment insurance reform makes no sense and excludes too many people who ought to be able to take advantage of it but cannot?

Hon. Pierre S. Pettigrew (Minister of Human Resources Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for his question.

Although it is clear that this morning's figures are not good, they do not show that the situation has worsened. On the contrary, there has been a small improvement, a very slight one, in the number of participants.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh.

Hon. Pierre S. Pettigrew: I admit it is very little, but this month's figures must not be used to claim that the situation has worsened. That is false.

As I have said in this House on a number of occasions, this participation rate is of concern to us and we are in the process of examining it very closely, in order to ensure that our system is properly serving the people of Canada.

Mr. Paul Crête (Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup—Témiscouata—Les Basques, BQ): Mr. Speaker, in 1993, when the government assumed power, 65% of the unemployed were drawing benefits. In 1995, 52% were, and now the figure is under 41%. This cannot go on. The minister must get moving.

Does the minister commit to proposing concrete solutions to this problem before the summer, yes or no?

Hon. Pierre S. Pettigrew (Minister of Human Resources Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am saying very clearly that we are concerned about this situation.

On that side, they like to say that the problem is easy to fix and that this figure is essentially linked to the eligibility criteria. I say that there are also changes in labour market conditions. The

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economy has also undergone changes. Seen overall, the situation is rather more complex and we will not make decisions blindly, as the opposition would like us to.

* * *

[English]

YOUNG OFFENDERS ACT

Miss Deborah Grey (Edmonton North, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, we have asked the justice minister literally dozens of times when she is going to make serious changes to the Young Offenders Act. She just giggles and keeps repeating “in a timely fashion”. Timely? It has been 10 months since the minister made the announcement and now her officials tell us it is going to be at least another six months before something happens. The minister is an utter failure. Why does she not admit she is not up to the job?

Hon. Anne McLellan (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I guess I can do no better than repeat that which I said in this House before. We on this side of the House are working very hard to complete the government’s response to the standing committee report. As I have said before, that response will be tabled in this House in a timely fashion.

Miss Deborah Grey (Edmonton North, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, victims of crime and young people themselves are saying that it is just not good enough to repeat “in a timely fashion” and “let me be clear”.

Let me be clear. The minister says that young offender reforms are her number one priority. I shudder to think what numbers two, three and four are.

I will ask the minister again. Why does she not just admit what the obvious is? She is in way over her head.

Hon. Anne McLellan (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, let me clarify for the hon. member that indeed the renewal of the youth justice system is one of my priorities but only one of my priorities and this government’s priorities as it relates to the justice system.

As I have said before and I will say it again, this government will not take a simplistic approach to the renewal of the youth justice system. We will table our response in a timely fashion.

* * *

[Translation]

VICTIMS OF CRIME

Mr. Michel Bellehumeur (Berthier—Montcalm, BQ): Mr. Speaker, we learned this week at the Standing Committee on Justice that the minister plans to establish a national office for victims of crime.

Does the minister realize that, with such a plan, she is about to willingly create duplication and overlap with an organization which is already performing, in Quebec, a function similar to that of the national office she plans to set up?

[English]

Hon. Anne McLellan (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, let me clarify for the hon. member that in fact I did not say that. I said there are a number of strategies we might wish to pursue in relation to the issues of victims rights and that in fact a national victims office might be one of those strategies. But I specifically asked the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights to look at that issue among others and report back to this House in terms of whether such an office is necessary. I think I made it very plain that I did not want to duplicate that which is being done in the provinces.

• (1440)

[Translation]

Mr. Michel Bellehumeur (Berthier—Montcalm, BQ): Mr. Speaker, given that Quebec already has a crime victims compensation office, will the minister undertake to include in her proposals the possibility for the provinces to opt out of her national plan with full financial compensation?

[English]

Hon. Anne McLellan (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, my commitment is clear. It is to work with the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights of which the hon. member is a member. I have asked that committee as part of its study on victims rights to determine whether a national office would have any utility. I await the committee’s recommendations.

* * *

YOUNG OFFENDERS ACT

Mr. Gurmant Grewal (Surrey Central, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, five young men, including a young offender, have been arrested in my riding for the senseless murder of a temple caretaker.

The RCMP is pleading for calm, patience and tolerance as their investigation continues. And the slow wheels of justice turn. Why will the justice minister not introduce changes to the Young Offenders Act in a timely fashion? That time is now. The clock is ticking and time is running out for her number one priority.

Hon. Anne McLellan (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member refers to a very tragic situation in the province of British Columbia.

What I do want to reassure everyone in this House about is that the existing provisions in relation to hate in the Criminal Code apply regardless of whether that hate is propagated via the Internet or any other means of communication. Therefore as far as I can tell

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at this point there is no problem with the application of our hate laws to this situation.

Mr. Gurmant Grewal (Surrey Central, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, in my riding this year we have had two violent murders of innocent seniors. While the justice minister makes lame excuses, Canadians are suffering.

The identity of the young offender will be kept secret and his sentence will not be more than 10 years.

Can the justice minister tell my grieving community how many more innocent people will be losing their jobs before she changes the Young Offenders Act in a timely fashion? The time has already run out for all those victims.

Hon. Anne McLellan (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am not sure I understand the question because I am not sure what it has to do with the loss of jobs. What I will say as I have said before is that this government will respond in a timely fashion to the recommendations of the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights.

* * *

[Translation]

FOOD INSPECTION

Mr. René Laurin (Joliette, BQ): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food.

Disturbing information has been circulating about the quality of operations at the Flamingo plant in Joliette, and this information has nearly jeopardized the future of this business.

Could the minister explain how such alarming information could have come from the Canadian Food Inspection Agency, when in fact there has never been any threat to public health?

[English]

Hon. Lyle Vanclief (Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I will agree that the health of consumers was not and will not be affected as a result of production at the particular plant that the hon. member is referring to. I can also tell the hon. member that it was not the Canadian Food Inspection Agency that released some information in a very inappropriate manner at a certain time. It was not the government that did so.

* * *

HUMAN RIGHTS

Ms. Colleen Beaumier (Brampton West—Mississauga, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, last month in Geneva at the United Nations Human Rights Commission everyone was astonished when after seven

years Cuba finally voted for the declaration on the protection of human rights defenders. When an NGO worker congratulated the Cubans on their support the reply was "You can thank Canada for that".

● (1445)

Would the Minister of Foreign Affairs please explain to the House and especially to the opposition how Canada's diplomatic efforts are helping to improve Cuba's position on human rights?

Hon. Lloyd Axworthy (Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, under the agreement we signed with Cuba last year we established a formal dialogue system with the Cubans on human rights. We have used that mechanism to enlist Cuban support for a Canadian initiative to protect human rights workers around the world.

This year Cuba changed its position. We now have a consensus that will go to the general assembly. For the 50th anniversary of the declaration of human rights, we will be able to provide protection for those brave men and women around the world who are fighting for human rights in their countries.

* * *

JUSTICE

Mr. Jack Ramsay (Crowfoot, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, exactly one year ago today I publicly introduced a minority report on amending the Young Offenders Act. My 65 page report fully addresses the complexities of this act and recommends a comprehensive three pronged approach to deal with youth crime.

Has the justice minister even bothered to read the proposals put forward by the official opposition to deal with youth crime in this country? Has she even bothered to read it?

Hon. Anne McLellan (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I can assure the hon. member that I have read the minority report from the official opposition as it relates to the Young Offenders Act.

Mr. Jack Ramsay (Crowfoot, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, then of course the justice minister realizes that contained within that report we address crime in this country, the complexities of youth crime, and recommend crime prevention through early detection and intervention, community diversion programs for non-violent offences and comprehensive and effective amendments to the YOA.

If the justice minister's officials are not competent enough to deal with these complexities will she replace them? If she feels that she is in over her head will she simply step aside and allow someone to—

Oral Questions

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Justice.

Hon. Anne McLellan (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I look forward to the strong support of the official opposition to the government's response when I table it in this House.

* * *

THE ENVIRONMENT

Mr. Rick Laliberte (Churchill River, NDP): Mr. Speaker, ozone recovery is an important issue to our environment and our health.

Last week Environment Canada provided remarkable ozone statistics, a 98% recovery, a statement carried by news organizations across this country. The following day, NASA and Columbia University studies stated that Arctic ozone losses were the highest observed in any previous year.

Will the Minister of the Environment explain to Canadians which numbers are correct, the Liberal numbers or the NASA scientific data?

Hon. Christine Stewart (Minister of the Environment, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the numbers the government is using with regard to what we have accomplished, which is significant on the issue of ozone depletion, as we have done a lot to improve that situation, come from scientists within the Department of the Environment. They are not Liberals. They are professional scientists.

It is a fact that we continue to do scientific work on this issue within our department. We are very concerned to continue to make sure that CFCs and ozone depleting substances are reduced until the ozone cover is cured completely.

Mr. Rick Laliberte (Churchill River, NDP): Mr. Speaker, NASA scientists predict the Arctic ozone hole will get worse. With greenhouse gas impacts contributing to potential disaster, the environmental integrity of this government is being questioned while the government signs more agreements and tells Canada it is doing a great job.

When will the Prime Minister show environmental leadership and commit adequate resources to environmental science and protection for the sake of our sustainable development?

Hon. Christine Stewart (Minister of the Environment, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, in our world there will never be enough science for us to fully understand the implications of all the serious things we are doing to the environment. However, we have a very adequate department that is science based and is researching on a continuous basis both the issue of greenhouse gases and ozone depleting substances, which are different.

Our objective is to make sure that we protect the environment to the highest standard possible and engage Canadians in that process, an important message on earth day.

* * *

● (1450)

HEPATITIS C

Mr. Greg Thompson (Charlotte, PC): Mr. Speaker, the hepatitis C issue is not going away as long as there is one member standing on this side of the House and one innocent victim who has not been compensated.

This is going to hang around the minister's neck like an albatross.

I am asking the minister to answer in a straightforward way, yes or no, is the door closed forever on this hepatitis C package.

Hon. Allan Rock (Minister of Health, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member should know that as long as he is there to ask questions, I shall be here, as long as the Prime Minister wishes me to serve as Minister of Health, to respond. I shall respond in a straightforward manner. I shall respond honestly and with feeling by saying that this is a tough issue. It is not easy. It is difficult.

None of us likes to say no to people who have been innocently harmed and who are asking for something which we cannot give. I am here to say, as I will say tomorrow, next week, next month and next year, that as a matter of public policy all governments of this country took the same position and we are doing the right thing. This is the agreement we all came to. This is the agreement by which we will stand. It is the only way we can maintain a sustainable public health care system in this country.

Mr. Greg Thompson (Charlotte, PC): Mr. Speaker, can you make any reason out of that answer? I do not think anyone in this House can, not even his own backbenchers.

Unfortunately the minister promised that this package was going to be fair and honourable. It is not fair and it is not honourable.

The only recourse these people will have will be the courts. I am asking the minister is he prepared to allow this to go before the courts. Does he honestly believe that their case is strong enough to sustain a court challenge? At the end of the day they are going to wind up paying more money—

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health.

Hon. Allan Rock (Minister of Health, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I take it the member is not asking for a legal opinion.

As a matter of public policy, the governments have done their best to determine which cases are those in which the public should pay cash to people harmed by the system. The best we can do, acting honestly and doing the best we can by people while respecting our responsibility in government, is to say that when we

Oral Questions

look at the history which Mr. Justice Krever spread out in front of us, there was a period of time during which governments could have acted and should have acted and they did not. Together we are contributing—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Hastings—Frontenac—Lennox and Addington.

* * *

THE ENVIRONMENT

Mr. Larry McCormick (Hastings—Frontenac—Lennox and Addington, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this weekend my family and I will be picking up garbage and planting trees to celebrate earth day.

Can the Minister of the Environment tell this House how the federal government is promoting earth day and encouraging all Canadians in contributing to a cleaner, greener and healthier earth?

Hon. Christine Stewart (Minister of the Environment, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I applaud my colleague for his activities to honour earth day. I hope every colleague in this House will do similarly.

It is a very important day in which communities, businesses and schools come together to do something to celebrate the importance of the environment.

Today I went out to St. Anthony's school in Ottawa. It is working with Nortel, with NGOs and the school students to improve their schoolyard, to make it the most beautiful schoolyard in Canada. Also today I approved 63 projects under an action 21—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Medicine Hat.

* * *

TAXATION

Mr. Monte Solberg (Medicine Hat, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, in recent years Canada has lost two professional hockey teams. The third is now on the ropes.

The reason for that is twofold. First, Canadian taxes are about 50% higher than in the U.S. Second, the Americans unfairly subsidize their hockey teams.

What is the government doing to lower taxes? What is it going to do about these unfair subsidies so that we can keep hockey in Canada?

Hon. Paul Martin (Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I congratulate the hon. member on realizing that there is a problem, a problem the government realized many months ago when it set up a parliamentary committee to look into these very things.

We look forward to the results of that committee in its conclusion.

• (1455)

[Translation]

CUBA

Mr. Daniel Turp (Beauharnois—Salaberry, BQ): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Prime Minister.

Outside the Second Summit of the Americas, the Prime Minister indicated that he was going to make an official visit to Cuba. This is the first official visit since 1976 by a head of the Canadian government to a country that continues to be cut off from the rest of the Americas.

Will the Prime Minister tell the House what concrete proposals he intends to make to President Castro to make it possible for him to participate in the Summit of the Americas and to facilitate Cuba's reintegration into inter-American institutions?

Right Hon. Jean Chrétien (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as the Minister of Foreign Affairs was saying earlier, we have been in communication with the Government of Cuba for a good while now and have developed a program of co-operation in a number of areas.

As for the issue of human rights, we are working together toward the creation of the position of ombudsman in that country's national assembly. There are all sorts of programs under way that we will discuss.

We hope that there will be improvements in Cuba, which may help facilitate Cuba's return to the family of the Americas.

* * *

[English]

TRADE

Mr. Bill Blaikie (Winnipeg—Transcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister for International Trade.

I wonder if the minister on earth day could tell the House whether he has had occasion to think twice about the wisdom of Canada's belonging to agreements like NAFTA or seeking to enter into agreements like the MAI or the FTAA which enable corporations to sue governments for pursuing environmental legislation like this government has with MMT.

When the minister goes to Paris next week will he be going to finally say he is listening to Canadians and he does not want Canada to be part of any MAI that has this provision in it?

Hon. Sergio Marchi (Minister for International Trade, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it would be appropriate on earth day if the NDP renounced its membership in the flat earth society. Certainly that would be a contribution.

Tributes

Canada through her trade deals has been able to energize our economy and also speak to high standards in those trade deals. In Chile, Canada and the Prime Minister were at the forefront in the creation of a civil society committee so that we can build an exciting project in the Americas and build it with all the groups that represent our society. Canada is at the forefront of—

The Speaker: The hon. member for St. John's East.

* * *

IMMIGRATION

Mr. Norman Doyle (St. John's East, PC): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration.

The minister is no doubt aware of the case of Sami Durgen, a Kurdish refugee whose case has been in the system for about a decade.

Mr. Durgen has been conducting a vigil in Toronto in an effort to get his landed status which was promised by the minister five years ago. I met with Mr. Durgen yesterday. He informed me that after 10 years of living in Canada he is still awaiting security clearance.

Would the minister please indicate how long this case can go on before Mr. Durgen gets some confirmation of his status in Canada?

[Translation]

Hon. Lucienne Robillard (Minister of Citizenship and Immigration, Lib.): As you know, Mr. Speaker, out of respect for people's privacy I am absolutely unable to supply details of an individual case in the House of Commons.

That having been said, it is very clear that, if we wish to admit someone to the country, we must comply with the relevant legislation, and security audits are a component of the file.

I can assure the opposition member that this file is being personally followed in the minister's office and that we hope to have answers for the individual in question shortly.

* * *

[English]

ORGANIZED CRIME

Ms. Shaughnessy Cohen (Windsor—St. Clair, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the media has been reporting infiltration by biker gangs into many areas of legitimate economic activity. They are alleged as well to control substantial drug trafficking networks and to perpetrate crimes of extreme violence.

Last year we passed strong anti-gang legislation which should help. What is the solicitor general doing to fight this kind of organized criminal activity?

Hon. Andy Scott (Solicitor General of Canada, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate very much the question from my colleague because organized crime is a serious problem in Canada.

We have passed the legislation necessary to fight it but we need to do more than that. We need to put together a national strategy that includes all law enforcement agencies. That is why on Friday I am bringing together 40 law enforcement agencies, the provinces and other criminal justice officials. We are going to put the strategy together to deal with this problem once and for all.

* * *

• (1500)

CANADA'S OLYMPIC AND PARALYMPIC ATHLETES

(House in committee to recognize Canada's 1998 Olympic Winter Games and Paralympic Games athletes)

Hon. Gilbert Parent (Speaker of the House of Commons): My colleagues, today is a very special day for us because we are to recognize on the floor of the House our Olympians and Paralympians. I ask them all to come in. When they come on to the floor I will speak to them on your behalf and will explain how we will do it.

[Editor's Note: Whereupon Canada's 1998 Olympic and Paralympic athletes entered the Chamber]

Some hon. members: Hear, hear.

• (1505)

Mr. Speaker Parent: Olympians and Paralympians of Canada and my colleagues, this winter the eyes of the world were on Nagano. A record number of athletes came together to compete in Olympic and Paralympic games.

These games represent human achievement and international friendship. They are a time for nations to engage in friendly competition and for athletes to pursue their dreams of excellence.

[Translation]

The men and women who represented us at Nagano were Canada's best athletes. To take part in the competitions over there represents a remarkable success. Those of you who returned with medals are recognized as being the best of the world's best.

Some of you have best ever records to your credit.

[English]

Whether we were in St. John's, Vancouver or Whitehorse, you had us all on the edge of our chairs. Canadians do not usually make a lot of noise, but when you won those medals there were 30 million people here in Canada who were damn ecstatic and very noisy.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear.

Routine Proceedings

Mr. Speaker Parent: All Canadians shared in your victories. You have made us all very proud. You have captured our imagination and are now the heroes of a new generation of Canadians. You represent the very finest in sport. You are symbols of everything Canada has to offer the world.

[*Translation*]

We are not used to having visitors on the floor of this House, but this is a special day and we wanted to bend the rules a bit in order to pay tribute to all of you, to congratulate you and to thank you for the great honour you have brought to our country.

[*English*]

My colleagues, I will read out the names of our Olympians and Paralympians. I know it might be difficult, but I would ask you to please hold your applause until the end and not to run on to the floor when I am finished because you will have a chance to meet our athletes in room 253-D right after we are finished this afternoon.

As I call your names—and I know you are a little close together—just raise your hand so that we can get an idea of where you are.

In the Paralympic sports, alpine skiing: Ramona Hoh; Mark Ludbrook; Daniel Wesley; Marni Winder, accompanied by her guide Dale Winder; and Karolina Wisniewska.

In cross-country skiing: Colette Bourgonje.

In sledge hockey: Yves Carrier, Dean Delaurier, David Eamer, Jamie Eddy, Angelo Gavillucci, Jean Labonté, Daniel Labrie, Robert Lagacé, Hervé Lord, Shawn Matheson, Dean Mellway, Todd Nicholson and Pierre Pichette.

The coaches of sledge hockey: Tom Goodings, Larry Hogan and Pierre Schweda.

In bobsleigh: David MacEachern.

In women's curling: Jan Betker; Atina Ford; Marcia Gudereit; Joan McCusker; and their coach, Anita Ford.

• (1510)

In men's curling: Mike Harris—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh.

Mr. Speaker Parent: Of course that is Mike Harris, the Olympian.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear.

Mr. Speaker Parent: Richard Hart, George Karrys, Collin Mitchell and Paul Savage.

In women's hockey: Jennifer Botterill; Thérèse Brisson; Cassie Campbell; Judy Diduck; Lori Dupuis; Danielle Goyette; Geraldine Heaney; Jayna Hefford; Becky Kellar; Kathy McCormack; Karen

Nystrom; Lesley Reddon; Laura Schuler; Fiona Smith; Vicky Sunohara; France St-Louis; Stacy Wilson; and their coaches, Ray Bennett and Danièle Sauvageau.

In speed skating, long track: Susan Auch and Jeremy Wotherpoon.

In speed skating, short track: Eric Bédard; Christine Boudrias; Derrick Campbell; Isabelle Charest; François Drolet; Annie Perreault; Tania Vicent; and their coaches, Marcel Lacroix and Nathalie Grenier.

These are the Paralympians and Olympians of Canada.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear.

Mr. Speaker Parent: We will see all of you in the Railway Committee Room. Thank you for coming.

[*Editor's Note: After the singing of the national anthem, Canada's 1998 Paralympic and Olympic athletes left the Chamber*]

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

• (1520)

[*Translation*]

GOVERNMENT RESPONSE TO PETITIONS

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

* * *

[*English*]

COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

FOREIGN AFFAIRS AND INTERNATIONAL TRADE

Ms. Colleen Beaumier (Brampton West—Mississauga, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the fourth report of the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Trade.

This report which deals with the disturbing issue of international child abductions is the first report of the Subcommittee on Human Rights and International Development. The compelling personal and written accounts of victims clearly demonstrated the need for government action. While recognizing that there is no immediate solution to the elimination of child abductions, we as members of Parliament have undertaken to recommend measures that will help to minimize the successful abduction of a child to another country.

On behalf of the members of the subcommittee I would like to thank everyone who took the time to participate in this study, the parents, NGOs, departmental officials, attorneys and others.

PROCEDURE AND HOUSE AFFAIRS

Mr. Peter Adams (Parliamentary Secretary to Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present the 27th report of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs regarding the selection of votable items in accordance with Standing Order 92.

This report is deemed adopted on presentation.

* * *

• (1525)

CRIMINAL CODE

Mr. John Reynolds (West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast, Ref.) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-391, an act to amend the Criminal Code (wearing of war decorations).

He said: Mr. Speaker, the enactment of this bill allows a relative of a deceased veteran to wear any decoration, et cetera, awarded to such such veteran without facing criminal sanctions.

The decoration must be worn on the right side of the relative's chest.

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

* * *

EXPORT DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION
PRIVATIZATION ACT

Mr. Charlie Penson (Peace River, Ref.) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-392, an act respecting the privatization of the Export Development Corporation and the disposal of the shares therein of Her Majesty in right of Canada.

He said: Mr. Speaker, this act would have two effects, to turn over to the private sector the provision of short and medium term insurance and financing, and to give back to a government department the task of assisting projects that are not commercially viable but which are thought to be in the public interest.

This bill is being moved because I believe it is inappropriate for a crown corporation to be in competition with the private sector and because I would like the minister responsible for providing a commercially non-viable loan to a developing country to be fully accountable to parliament.

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

Routine Proceedings

PRIVACY COMMISSIONER

Hon. Don Boudria (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I believe you will find unanimous consent to adopt this motion upon being read. I move:

That, in accordance with subsection 53(3) of the act to extend the present laws of Canada that protect the privacy of individuals and that provide individuals with a right of access to personal information about themselves, Chapter P-21 of the Revised Statutes of Canada, 1985, this House approves the reappointment of Mr. Bruce Phillips as privacy commissioner for a term of two years.

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

(Motion agreed to)

* * *

PETITIONS

MULTILATERAL AGREEMENT ON INVESTMENT

Mr. Nelson Riis (Kamloops, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have three petitions. I will present them quickly to allow others the opportunity to present theirs as well.

The first petition is from a number of constituents who are very concerned about the government's intention to impose the MAI on Canadians without anybody really knowing what it is all about and without holding proper consultations, et cetera.

They point out dozens of reasons why they oppose the MAI and simply ask the Parliament of Canada never to sign such an agreement.

TAXATION

Mr. Nelson Riis (Kamloops, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the second petition is from petitioners mostly in the Kamloops region. They have been filling out their tax returns and are upset with the tax system. They feel it is biased, unfair and unjust. They feel it favours large corporations over small business and wealthy Canadians over average working Canadians.

The petitioners simply urge the government to undertake a fair tax reform so that personal consumers not suffer any further financial insecurity and unfair costs at this critical time of tax filing.

Routine Proceedings

● (1530)

PENSIONS

Mr. Nelson Riis (Kamloops, NDP): Mr. Speaker, people have been hearing all kinds of concerns and rumours about the government's intention regarding the pension plan revisions. The petitioners simply ask that before any changes are made to our retirement system an adequate period of consultation occur across the country so every Canadian can have the chance to examine the implications. They are asking for a national referendum on this issue.

TAXATION

Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have two petitions to present today. The first is signed by a number of Canadians including some from my own riding.

The petitioners would like to draw to the attention of the House that managing the family home and caring for preschool children is an honourable profession which has not been recognized for its value to our society. They also point out that the Income Tax Act discriminates against families who choose to provide care in the home for their preschool children. The petitioners therefore call upon parliament to pursue initiatives to eliminate this tax discrimination against families who choose to provide care in the home for their preschool children.

LABELLING OF ALCOHOLIC BEVERAGES

Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the second petition again is from a number of Canadians including some from my riding of Mississauga South. It deals with the labelling of alcoholic beverages.

The petitioners would like to draw to the attention of the House that the Food and Drugs Act is designed to protect Canadians from the potentially harmful effects related to food and drug consumption and that consumption of alcoholic beverages may cause health problems, and particularly that fetal alcohol syndrome and other alcohol related birth defects are 100% preventable by avoiding alcohol consumption during pregnancy.

The petitioners therefore call upon parliament to require health warning labels to be placed on containers of alcoholic beverages to warn expectant mothers and others of the risks associated with alcohol consumption.

PARENTAL RIGHTS AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Mr. Garry Breitkreuz (Yorkton—Melville, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, I have quite a large number of petitions. I have put them into two groups.

I am pleased to present 19 petitions with the signatures of 476 Canadians from eight different provinces. They are concerned that by ratifying and implementing the United Nations convention on the rights of the child, government bureaucrats and the courts will

be legally entitled to determine what is "in the best interests of the child" not parents.

The petitioners go on to say that Canada is creating a bureaucracy to police parents and enforce the guidelines in a UN charter which has never been approved by parliament. Not only are parental rights being undermined by implementing this UN charter but they are concerned it will create greater incentives for families to abdicate their parental responsibilities to the state.

The petitioners request parliament to address their concerns by supporting my private member's motion M-33 which would include parental rights and responsibilities in the charter of rights and freedoms.

CRIMINAL CODE

Mr. Garry Breitkreuz (Yorkton—Melville, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, the second group of petitions I am pleased to present has five petitions with the signatures of 127 Canadians from British Columbia and New Brunswick.

These citizens of Canada support retention of section 43 of the Criminal Code which states "every school teacher, parent or person standing in the place of a parent is justified in using force by way of correction toward a pupil or child which is under his care if the force does not exceed what is reasonable under the circumstances".

The petitioners request parliament to affirm the duty of parents to responsibly raise their children according to their own conscience and beliefs and retain section 43 in Canada's Criminal Code as it is currently worded.

GOODS AND SERVICES TAX

Mr. Ted McWhinney (Vancouver Quadra, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have the pleasure to present a petition signed by 390 people living mainly in the Delta, Surrey and White Rock areas of greater Vancouver. They are asking parliament to remove the GST from books, magazines and newspapers.

MULTILATERAL AGREEMENT ON INVESTMENT

Mr. Werner Schmidt (Kelowna, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 36 it is my privilege to present a petition.

The petitioners request that parliament impose a moratorium on the ratification of the MAI until full public hearings on the proposed treaty are held across the country so that all Canadians can have an opportunity to express their opinion on same.

Mr. Ovid L. Jackson (Bruce—Grey, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 36 I would like to present a petition signed by 202 of my constituents in the riding of Bruce—Grey.

These petitioners hail from communities like Paisley, Durham, Warton and Shallow Lake. They outline their concerns regarding the multilateral agreement on investment. They ask that parliament

impose a moratorium on the Canadian participation in the MAI negotiations until full public debate takes place in Canada.

• (1535)

TRANS-CANADA HIGHWAY

Mr. Lee Morrison (Cypress Hills—Grasslands, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, I have two more petitions with respect to the Trans-Canada death strip between Gull Lake, Saskatchewan and the Alberta border. There are 195 signatures from residents close to that piece of highway. This brings the total signatures to 2,119 that I have presented in this House on this issue.

The petitioners point out that although the maintenance of highways is constitutionally a provincial responsibility, the federal government has a responsibility to help with the maintenance of the Trans-Canada system.

The Government of Saskatchewan is about to proceed without federal help in twinning this highway. The petitioners call upon Parliament to instruct its servants to begin negotiations with Saskatchewan to jointly fund the construction of two additional lanes on the death strip.

BIOARTIFICIAL KIDNEY

Mr. Peter Adams (Peterborough, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to present another in a series of petitions by people who want to help the 18,000 Canadians who suffer from end-stage kidney disease.

These petitioners support the development of a bioartificial kidney project in Canada. This particular petition is signed by more than 500 people, all of whom work in the GM truck plant in Oshawa. These are people who live in the communities north of Lake Ontario.

They point out that kidney dialysis has been a good treatment, that transplantation has been an effective treatment, but that a bioartificial kidney would give great hope to people who cannot be helped by existing treatments.

* * *

[Translation]

QUESTIONS ON THE ORDER PAPER

Mr. Peter Adams (Parliamentary Secretary to Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the following question will be answered today: No.70.

[Text]

Question No. 70—**Mrs. Diane Ablonczy:**

With regard to the Child Care-Visions and First Nations/Inuit program during the financial year 1996 to 1997: (a) what was the purpose of this program; (b) what was the total amount spent; (c) what were the main programs, with respect to cost, to which these funds were allocated; (d) what was the total number; (e) what is the name of the organization, group or individual to whom each grant or subsidy was given; (f) what

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was the stated purpose of each grant or subsidy; and (g) what was the cost of each grant or subsidy provided?

Hon. Pierre S. Pettigrew (Minister of Human Resources Development, Lib.): a) The First Nations and Inuit child care initiative is designed to overcome a major hurdle for aboriginal parents by providing affordable and quality child care in First Nations and Inuit communities. With improved access to child care, aboriginal parents will be better able to work or participate in employment training to improve the financial prospects of their families, thereby contributing to the development of their communities.

b) The Government of Canada is committed to providing developmental funding of \$72 million over three years. The budget breakdown is \$6 million for 1995-96, \$26 million for 1996-97, \$40 million for 1997-98.

c) All funds were utilized through this program. Ongoing funding of \$36 million a year will be available after the initial three-year start-up period.

d) The First Nations and Inuit child care program will support the creation of 4,300 new aboriginal child care spaces and the improvement of 1,700 existing spaces for a total of 6,000 quality child care spaces.

e) Annex A is the list of organizations that have received funding under this program in 1996-97.

f) Funding was granted to aboriginal bands and tribal councils. These funds may have been broken down and redistributed within each band or council. However these funds were, as stated in section (a), used to improve and create aboriginal child care spaces. Proposals are received at Human Resources Development Canada stating the purpose of the grants and subsidies, but are not entered into our databases. This information is kept on file and may be retrieved manually if required, but it is very costly in terms of time and manpower.

g) Annex A is the list of organizations that have received funding under this program in 1996-97.

ANNEX A

FIRST NATIONS/INUIT CHILD CARE STATUS REPORT 1996/97

PROVINCE	ORGANIZATION	TOTAL
Alberta	Grand Council Treaty 8 First Nations	\$1,019,666
Alberta	Treaty 7 Tribal Council	\$1,019,666
Alberta	Treaty 6	\$886,498
Alberta	Saddle Lake Chief and Council	\$133,168
B.C.	B.C. First Nations Summit	\$3,359,000
Man.	Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs	\$5,035,000
N.B.	Mawiw District Council	\$295,000

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PROVINCE	ORGANIZATION	TOTAL
N.B.	Union of New Brunswick Indians	\$152,000
Nfld.	Conne River Health & Social Services	\$40,000
Nfld.	Labrador Inuit Health Commission	\$506,000
N.S.	Mi'kmaw Education Authority	\$599,000
N.W.T.	Dene Nation	\$750,000
N.W.T.	Inuvialuit Social Development Program	\$300,000
N.W.T.	Pauktuutit Inuit Women's Association	\$1,837,000
P.E.I.	Lennox Island First Nations	\$40,000
Quebec	Assembly of First Nations Quebec/Labrador	\$1,907,108
Quebec	Cree Regional Authority	\$749,892
Quebec	Kativik Regional Government	\$743,000
Ontario	Ontario Indian Social Services Council	\$1,991,000
Sask.	Federation of Saskatchewan Indian Nations	\$4,163,000
Yukon	Council of Yukon First Nations	\$213,000
National	Pauktuutit Inuit Women's Association	\$64,780
National	Assembly of First Nations	\$50,000
National	Pauktuutit Inuit Women's Association	\$113,220
	GRAND TOTAL:	\$25,966,998

[Translation]

Mr. Peter Adams (Parliamentary Secretary to Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I suggest that the remaining questions be allowed to stand.

The Deputy Speaker: Is that agreed.

Some hon. members: Agreed.

* * *

[English]

MOTIONS FOR PAPERS

Mr. Peter Adams (Parliamentary Secretary to Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Notice of Motion for the Production of Papers No. P-5 in the name

of the hon. member for Brandon—Souris is acceptable to the government, except for those documents which cannot be released pursuant to the Access to Information Act. The papers are tabled immediately.

That an Order of the House do issue for copies of all plans, drawings, documents and proposals initiated by the Crown, or by others on behalf of the Crown, surrounding the disposition, current or planed proposals to rectify the grain transportation delays that occurred in the 1996-97 crop year in Western Canada.

The Deputy Speaker: Subject to the reservations expressed by the parliamentary secretary is it the pleasure of the House that Notice of Motion No. P-5 be deemed to have been adopted?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

(Motion agreed to)

Mr. Peter Adams: Mr. Speaker, I ask that other Notices of Motions for the Production of Papers be allowed to stand.

The Deputy Speaker: Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[English]

NUNAVUT ACT

The House resumed from April 20 consideration of the motion that Bill C-39, an act to amend the Nunavut Act and the Constitution Act, 1867, be read the second time and referred to a committee.

The Deputy Speaker: When debate on this item was last interrupted, the hon. member for Prince Albert had the floor. He has 15 minutes remaining in his time for his remarks.

Mr. Derrek Konrad (Prince Albert, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, I will not take 15 minutes. My intervention will be brief.

It has been brought to my attention since I last spoke in this debate that we were being somewhat critical of the people of the Northwest Territories which is not so. If we are critical of anyone, we are critical of the Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development, particularly the minister, for its handling of the entire Northwest Territories.

The territories suffer a 30% unemployment rate and high suicide. They have poor health, reduced life expectancy, not to mention other social problems. This has happened during the administration of the previous Tory and current Liberal governments. We feel that the previous government completely failed the people of the Northwest Territories in developing its economy and its society. This bill should be amended and passed.

• (1540)

We feel that the new government being established will have a far greater chance to develop a vision for its people, to implement it

and to give its people hope. It has been written that without a vision people will perish. We want to see these people and their families move ahead and prosper economically and socially. We want the very best for these people which they have not been getting.

The legislation moves power downward toward the people who will be governed. That should mean that the people of the Northwest Territories will have more influence on their government. I am sure this will produce better government in the eastern Arctic. We support them in that endeavour.

We call for an elected senator and we make our support for this bill conditional upon that. We feel that better government includes people being able to pick their representatives in this place.

We question the government on its evasiveness and lack of preparedness in answering questions about cost. Early estimates of the cost of establishing Nunavut were in the range of \$150 million. That did not happen. A later estimate made in October 1997 set the price in the order of \$300 million which is double the cost. If they know why that is, they are not willing to say. So we do not know. We know it will cost more to increase the government because there will be another government in place in Nunavut. We would like to see a reduction in the size of DIAND to compensate for the increased cost of establishing and maintaining this new government.

We as the official opposition have a responsibility to the taxpayers of Canada to ask questions about this and to get direct answers from the government on these matters. We cannot simply stand by, clap our hands, say that is wonderful and whatever the cost, we approve of it 100%. We are not standing in the way of these people achieving their goal but we want to know what the cost will be and how it will be offset in reduced costs for DIAND. That is a major concern our party has with this legislation at this time.

Hon. Ethel Blondin-Andrew (Secretary of State (Children and Youth), Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to speak to Bill C-39, an act to amend the Nunavut Act and Constitution Act, 1867. This is a critical piece of legislation that is necessary as we move toward the creation of Nunavut on April 1, 1999, which is less than a year from now, to complete the whole process of the division of the Northwest Territories. As the member of parliament for the Western Arctic, I am in full support of this bill.

There is a coming of age in the Northwest Territories as there has never been before. The political destiny of the north has been decided. We are going to divide the Northwest Territories and create the new territory of Nunavut with all the tools of a democratic society. This will include a governance structure. This would not be possible without the approval of this bill. We need this bill.

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This is an exciting time in the north. It is a time of much progression. The north is very political. If people from any other part of Canada or the world go to the north they will speak to some of the most knowledgeable and well travelled people. We live in a microcosm of all the things that affect people from other parts of our country and from abroad. Northerners travel the world. Northerners are very political. They are very knowledgeable about the politics of the day nationally, internationally and territorially.

● (1545)

We are rife with activity. We have many resource based activities that affect both of the new territories which will emerge.

We have three of the biggest diamond mining companies in the world right at the back door of those people who will be responsible for running their own activities. We have Aber Resources and Rio Tinto. We also have the Broken Hill Proprietary, BHP, Monopros and DeBeers.

We are also being bombarded continually with the attempts of many groups to explore for other resources such as oil and gas.

We have in our midst a very friendly invasion of tourists who are captivated not only by the environment of the north but by the various aspects and phenomena of our environment such as the aurora borealis. We have captivated Japanese tourists and other people from around the world who come to the north.

Given the opportunities and tools and armed with the legislation we have here we believe that people of the north will be able to take full advantage of that potential. That is not to mention the collective leadership and wisdom, the corporate knowledge, the linguistic and cultural strength of peoples from both territories which will be reflected in the kind of leadership that leads those people once we have made the commitment to pass this legislation. All the work that has already been undertaken, all of the preparation, all of the visionary strategies, the far-reaching planning and the training must not be ignored.

It can be said that if you want to do the right thing in creating a democracy the principles of democracy are not necessarily predicated on price or cost. Sometimes democracy is costly. We would not have ten provinces and two territories if we did not endure cost. If that were not the case, Newfoundland, Manitoba and Saskatchewan would not be provinces today.

If we talk about self-sustaining entities of governance, some of those provinces would not be provinces today. Why apply one set of rules to them and another set of rules to the territories?

Bill C-39 is about making democracy work. Without this bill Nunavut would not have a fully elected territorial leadership from its beginning days. This legislation provides for the election of a legislative assembly before the territory officially comes into existence. That is very important. Without that amendment to the Nunavut Act a commissioner without a mandate from the people of

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Nunavut would govern the new Nunavut government. We cannot return, however briefly, to the early days of the Northwest Territories when governance was done from afar, in absentia, when the Northwest Territories was run from the south without having those people resident to really experience and be part of what needed to be done at the time. We now have an opportunity.

The people have been assigned their duties and they must be empowered to carry them out. As legislators we can agree that locally elected representatives must govern Nunavut from day one. Elections in the north are very difficult. Having firsthand experience in campaigning in the last three elections in the north, I know how difficult it is and how much lead time is required before an election. The sheer distance, the remoteness, not to mention the severe inclement weather and environmental experiences can create problems during an election. These are some of the things that are to be considered.

The cost of an election is also something that is quite prohibitive.

This bill also addresses other important issues to ensure democracy. Bill C-39 proposes amendments to guarantee representation of both Nunavut and the Northwest Territories in both the House of Commons and in the Senate of Canada.

As my colleague, the hon. member for Nunavut, would be happy to confirm, all Nunavutmiut, all northerners and all Canadians have a basic right to be represented in both institutions of parliament. This bill is necessary to ensure that both the hon. member for Nunavut's constituents and my constituents have this basic right.

• (1550)

This bill ensures that both Nunavut and the Northwest Territories will have their own representatives in both the Senate and the House of Commons, which is not unlike anywhere else in Canada.

This House and all Canadians listened with great interest to the debate of two days ago in this Chamber. Unfortunately the Leader of the Official Opposition was trying to use this legislation as a springboard to advance the Reform Party's cause for Senate reform. Senate Reform is something that we all think about, but I do believe that timing and appropriateness is everything in terms of politics. We have to know the right time to speak on the right issue. Unfortunately this type of grandstanding and manipulation is unacceptable. It does nothing to make gains on the issue that is being promoted.

The Leader of the Official Opposition is trying to steer the debate away from one of the most exciting and interesting events that is happening in our country. It will shape the history of Canada. I do not believe that was necessarily intentional. I hope with the appropriate understanding of the north itself that would change. I hope it was not intentional. Given the right information, anyone can become informed, make the right choices and have the

appropriate sensitivity about such an exciting opportunity as this for the north.

Instead of highlighting the good work done by the parties involved in the creation of Canada's newest territory and celebrating the biggest event since Newfoundland joined Confederation, the Reform Party is trying to advance its own agenda on the backs of northerners. I regret having to say that because to attack on the basis of partisanship is not part of my personality and normally it is not part of my political dialogue. I like to deal with the issues.

I have a very different view of the chamber of second sober thought. Next year will be my 10th year in the House of Commons. When I was elected in 1988 there were many senators who had lives before they came here. Some had been members of parliament. Some were business people who were renowned and revered in their communities. They were my mentors and taught me many things. I think of Senator Allan MacEachen, bless his soul.

I sat on the Charest committee, the Beaudoin—Dobbie committee and worked on Meech Lake. Much of the basic fundamental understanding I gained on constitutional issues came from some of those senators who were there from the very beginning. They had the collective wisdom, experience, education and knowledge.

To paint that picture of all senators and of that chamber, to put it in disrepute, is unacceptable to me. I have no political motives in saying that, except perhaps to say that my experiences have been different.

Instead of highlighting the good work done by senators from all parties, it was as if they were trying to make their case by using a few extreme examples. There is no Utopia. There is no absolutely perfect system. Every system has its bugs.

The reality is that we have a bicameral system of governance. Northerners are entitled to be fully represented. In my opinion the two chambers are effective as they exist today. Perhaps some individuals, in both Houses, could be faulted at different times. After all, they are only human. But the present system is the one we chose. It is the one that has been upheld and it works. In my opinion it works well.

To be honest, this is a very non-partisan issue for me. I think about Conservative appointed members like Wilbert Keon who is renowned around the world for his work as a heart surgeon. Landon Pearson is extraordinary in her work on behalf of children internationally. She serves as an adviser to the Minister of Foreign Affairs. I have worked with Landon Pearson. I know her commitment,

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dedication and untiring efforts. Jack Austin comes from a business background. He is known throughout Asia for his work.

• (1555)

These people did not just land here with no experience and with nothing to offer. These people have something to offer.

We should be proud when we are elected or appointed. We should be proud of what we do.

I think of Senator Jacques Hébert and his tireless work on behalf of young people, specifically Katimavik.

Sister Peggy Butts is a nun from Atlantic Canada who was appointed to the Senate. It is an unusual and great opportunity.

I was given literature to read when I first came here as a young MP. One of the first pieces I was asked to read was done by Senator David Croll. It was an outstanding piece concerning poverty. Some of its elements are still as relevant today as they were when he first wrote it. It is very thought provoking, very sensitive and all encompassing. Have a look. These people have something to offer.

Senator Eugene Forsey was one of the great thinkers, the big dreamers. In my language a big dreamer is not someone foolish; a big dreamer is someone who has a vision, who understands more than their own vision or more than their own internal little world. They can see many things. He was one of those people.

Senator Serge Joyal was a former secretary of state. He had vision. He is the person who made the agreement with the Northwest Territories for the first Canada-NWT language agreement. Not only did he provide for French-language services or bilingual services, he gave the Northwest Territories the opportunity, with \$16 million, to develop an aboriginal language component for its government in which unilingual jurors and unilingual members of their legislative assembly could serve.

These people have something to offer. It is not all bad. Who better represents the views of the people of Labrador than Bill Rompkey, a former member of parliament? I have heard him. I worked with him on the Constitution.

I could go on. These are just a few examples, but they are positive ones. These are people who work just as hard as any member of parliament. They are just as committed as any member of parliament.

This bill goes further than allowing for fair and equitable representation in the Nunavut legislative assembly and in parliament. It is necessary to enable the interim commissioner for Nunavut to enter into formal agreements and contracts that are essential to ensuring that the new government is functional from day one.

The scope of the agreements needed range from the supply of materials to the delivery of medical and educational services for Nunavut residents. This bill makes sure that the essential services

and functions of a territorial government will be in place on April 1, 1999.

Without this legislation the interim commissioner and his officials would not be able to enter into these agreements. This means that those reciprocal agreements for health care could not be set up. The agreements allowing Nunavut youth the opportunity to attend southern post-secondary schools could not be negotiated without this legislation. That is why this legislation is so important to the people of Nunavut and to the whole of the territory.

This legislation also deals with the division of assets and liabilities between the Government of the Northwest Territories and the Government of Nunavut.

The new territory will require new laws relevant to its own jurisdiction. The original Nunavut Act provides for an initial legislative base for the new territory by grandfathering the application of territorial laws currently in force in the Northwest Territories.

Bill C-39 clarifies how these laws will be applied to Nunavut by defining the practical results in a variety of situations. For example, the grandfathering of laws would normally mean that all bodies that have been created under Northwest Territories law would automatically exist in Nunavut.

However, there are a number of instances where the creation of parallel bodies will not be necessary. With this in mind, Bill C-39 will ensure that the duplicating effect does not include bodies which have no relation to Nunavut, such as municipal corporations in the other region, the Mackenzie Valley.

As well, the proposed amendments will allow some exceptions to the duplicating effect where it is agreed that a single body such as the Workers' Compensation Board can continue to serve both jurisdictions effectively. These are practical amendments that all Canadians have an interest in.

• (1600)

As the Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development stated on Monday, Bill C-39 includes amendments that clarify the creation of a Nunavut court system similar to that of the Northwest Territories. The proposed amendments also ensure that cases pending before the courts at the date of division will be clearly sorted out between the Northwest Territories and the new Nunavut courts.

With as much work as there is to finish, we cannot forget the work that has already been accomplished in the creation of Nunavut. One of the most critical issues being addressed is the need to train Inuit for positions at all levels of the Nunavut public service.

In April 1996 the government announced a \$39.8 million fund for human resources for Nunavut. More than 500 Inuit have been enrolled to receive training in the use of computers, in administrative skills and financial planning, all of the functions of a modern

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government. Many are also learning from their participation in building the new Nunavut government buildings and staff housing.

This not only shows how committed the federal government is in establishing the new Nunavut territory; it also shows how committed Nunavut residents are to their new territory by taking advantage of the opportunities to learn these new skills. These skills are very important to the success of the Nunavut territory.

There is a section which we have to become very aware of, that of Senate reform. I need to deal with the specific issue of Senate reform. On page 27 of Bill C-39 it states:

45. The member of the Senate who represents the Northwest Territories immediately before the day that section 3 of the Nunavut Act comes into force shall, on and after that day, continue as the member of the Senate who represents one of the following:

(a) Nunavut, if the member resides in the part of the Northwest Territories referred to in section 3 of that Act immediately before that day; or

(b) the Northwest Territories, in any other case.

This is legalese. My point is that the legislation is such that once the Nunavut Senate seat is approved, if the current sitting member in the Northwest Territories seat as it is now is from the east, he or she will slide over into the newly created Nunavut seat and a new senator from the west will be appointed.

I think it is a great opportunity. We have a great tradition in our country. We have created 10 provinces and two new territories. We are now dividing the Northwest Territories. We are going to empower those people, give them the tools, give them the support to do for themselves what we have not been able to do for them.

Mr. Gerald Keddy (South Shore, PC): Mr. Speaker, it is my intent to speak to Bill C-39, an act to amend the Nunavut Act and the Constitution Act, 1867. It is not my intent to speak on other matters which have nothing to do with this bill, as other members of this House have done. I would like to make that very clear at the outset.

This is a historic piece of legislation which will create a new territory on April 1, 1999, Nunavut, meaning our land in the Inuit language. This new territory is being created as part of the Nunavut land claim agreement signed by the Progressive Conservative government in 1993. The new territory will be 2,242,000 square kilometres, approximately one-fifth the size of Canada and 69% of the existing Northwest Territories.

The idea of creating a new territory in the northern region of Canada was brought to the Parliament of Canada in 1965. It was not until the plebiscite in 1982 that the residents of the Northwest Territories voted on the creation of a new territory. The 1982 plebiscite achieved 54% approval with a 90% yes vote in the

eastern regions. Those eastern regions will become the new territory of Nunavut.

• (1605)

The next step was to determine a boundary between the two regions and a plebiscite was held in 1992 to ratify this selection. This was followed in 1993 with the signing of the Nunavut land claim agreement that sets out the creation of the Nunavut territory. This land claim agreement is the largest of its kind in Canada.

Along with setting out the creation of Nunavut it gives Inuit title to 350,000 square kilometres with about one-tenth of this including mineral rights. It also gives the Inuit a stronger voice on some management boards and a share of royalties from oil, gas and mineral development on crown lands. As well it sets out the creation of three new federally funded parks.

I had the pleasure of visiting the Northwest Territories last fall and spoke with a number of people who expressed concern over the readiness of the new territory to meet the deadline in 1999. There are still a number of questions that need to be addressed to ensure a smooth transition to the new territory and no loss of service as this occurs.

This piece of legislation we are now speaking on today addresses a number of concerns arising from the division of the Northwest Territories on April 1, 1999. Specifically the legislation decreases the number of members required by the western region to form a government. This recognizes that the 14 members left after division will be sufficient to govern, not the current requirement of 15. As well the legislation will provide for two seats in the House of Commons and the other place, again to ensure that both regions are represented and have a voice in federal government.

Division of assets and liabilities is also considered, as is the establishment of a judicial system that will be prepared to operate in a fair and ongoing manner.

The eastern and western regions of the Arctic however have not satisfactorily dealt with the division of some of the essential services.

Just a few weeks ago the Nunavut leaders rejected a proposal by the Government of the Northwest Territories to divide the Northwest Territories Power Corporation. The proposal was for 60% ownership by the western region and 40% by the eastern region. While the two sides agree that economies of scale and other such factors support maintaining one enterprise for the two regions rather than the establishment of two separate bodies, it is necessary to reach consensus on how this should be achieved. The eastern region feels anything less than a 50:50 split is insufficient.

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I use that as an example of some of the hurdles that are still in the way of this becoming reality by April 1, 1999. It is this kind of problem that must be dealt with by the western and eastern regions prior to that date to ensure continuation of operations and services when the new territory comes into being.

Although this legislation states that the law which is currently in place in the Northwest Territories will also apply in the new territory, any disruption in service could have a significant impact on the new region's ability to govern. Financial considerations must also be addressed.

The western region will also be facing significant changes as it is downsized from its current operations and focuses on service provision for the western residents. This will mean changes in government office space and staff requirements. Conversely the eastern region will be building and hiring.

A report prepared by the Government of the Northwest Territories regarding transition costs and the creation of the new territory estimates that \$3.8 million will be needed by the western region to modify office space for new requirements as the size of the government changes the focus on the western region.

As well the western region will continue to provide services in the eastern region on a contractual basis until the new territory is well established. This will be an additional cost to both sides. The Government of the Northwest Territories estimates the cost of retention and recruitment of staff to fulfil these contractual obligations will be in the vicinity of \$2 million in the first year, 1999 to 2000, and \$1 million for each subsequent year.

At the same time the cost of contracting services from the western region will be an extra cost for Nunavut as it pays for the construction of its own infrastructure and staffing requirements. The cost of having to rent space in the western region while also facing the cost of infrastructure in Nunavut is an additional cost that has not been accounted for by the government in making this plan.

• (1610)

Another estimate by the Government of the Northwest Territories report is that only 10% to 15% of its workforce directly affected by division will seek employment in Nunavut. This will exacerbate a problem already faced by Nunavut, obtaining the necessary workforce estimated at 600 people. As well, employment opportunities created by other provisions of the land claim agreement could create competition among employers for experienced staff.

The federal transition funding plan estimates that only 150 Nunavut staff will be hired by the time division occurs. This means Nunavut will not be in a strong position to assume control of operations necessary for the daily operation of government services. At the same time, according to the transition action plan of

the Government of the Northwest Territories, experienced staff are already leaving because of job insecurity.

This is an immediate problem for this government which certainly needs to be addressed by this government. To date we have not seen anything put forward by the government to recognize the fact that there is even a problem.

This legislation will address some of the concerns I mentioned earlier. These amendments will provide the interim commissioner with the authority to enter into contractual obligations with staff to ensure that employees do not have to be hired on a short term or temporary basis. This should alleviate some of the problems with job insecurity.

A major component of Nunavut public government that will represent all residents of the eastern region, Inuit and non-Inuit alike, is the decentralization of government. This was an important provision in the land claim agreement that set out the government's structure.

Decentralization it is hoped will provide everyone, even those people living in remote areas, with a voice in government. Given the size of Nunavut and its sparse population, this is laudatory but harder to implement. The chances of attracting qualified staff to the 11 communities of the decentralized government may be difficult especially in the short term. These uncertainties increase the risk of stoppages in services at a critical time when Nunavut is to be created. With the infrastructure not scheduled to be in place until the year 2000 for the outlying communities of the decentralized government, this will place an additional burden on office space in Iqaluit which will be the capital of Nunavut.

Although there is some uncertainty surrounding the creation of Nunavut, and I have tried to set that uncertainty forth today so that everyone in the House can understand it, this is a historic event that is deserving of praise for those people who have worked so long to see this happen. The Inuit both as individual community members and through the different organizations operating on their behalf have worked hard to see their goal achieved. This will be accomplished on April 1, 1999. This legislation ensures that a government will be in place to begin operations at that time. At least we hope this legislation ensures that a government will be in place to begin operations at that time.

I would like to congratulate the people of both the eastern and western Arctic regions who have helped to attempt to bring this to reality.

I am pleased to support this bill in principle and look forward to studying and amending it at the committee stage. It will be at the committee stage that we will continue to try to address some of the inadequacies and some of the problems that threaten this piece of legislation which is by far a piece of proactive legislation and should be commended.

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Ms. Marlene Catterall (Ottawa West—Nepean, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. Discussions have taken place between the parties and I believe you will find consent for the following motion. I move:

That if a recorded division is requested later this day on second reading of Bill C-39, the said division shall be deemed deferred until Tuesday, April 28, 1998 at the end of the time provided for Government Orders.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. McClelland): The House has heard the terms of the motion. Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

(Motion agreed to)

• (1615)

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

Some hon. members: Question.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. McClelland): Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. McClelland): All those in favour of the motion will please say yea.

Some hon. members: Yea.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. McClelland): All those opposed will please say nay.

Some hon. members: Nay.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. McClelland): In my opinion the yeas have it.

And more than five members having risen:

The Acting Speaker (Mr. McClelland): Pursuant to order early this day, the vote stands deferred until Tuesday next.

* * *

[Translation]

PENSION BENEFITS STANDARDS ACT, 1985

The House resumed from April 3 consideration of the motion that Bill S-3, an act to amend the Pension Benefits Standards Act, 1985 and the Office of the Superintendent of Financial Institutions Act, be read the second time and referred to a committee.

Mr. Yvan Loubier (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I shall be brief, as this is essentially a housekeeping bill.

Bill S-3 amends the Pension Benefits Standards Act, 1985 and the Office of the Superintendent of Financial Institutions Act,

enhancing the powers of the superintendent to supervise the management of private pension plans.

My party will save its questions and in-depth consideration of certain provisions of the bill for the Standing Committee on Finance. We have a number of concerns about this bill, particularly with clauses like clause 6(3), which provides that pension plan administrators are not liable if they relied in good faith on “financial statements of the pension plan prepared by an accountant”—the type of accountant is not specified—“or a report of an accountant, an actuary, a lawyer, a notary or another professional person whose profession lends credibility to the report”.

There are some very interesting questions for departmental officials.

We also have some reservations about clause 9.2 and intend to clarify the scope of this clause when it is studied in committee. Clause 9.2(8) provides that the arbitrator shall not be bound when there is a dispute, and I quote:

9.2(8) The arbitrator is not bound by any legal or technical rules of evidence in conducting any matter that comes before the arbitrator—

It would perhaps be better for the rules of law and equity to prevail in cases of disagreement over management of a pension fund.

In clause 9.2(15), it would be interesting to have clear answers. This clause provides that the executive of a union shall represent its members, but not its former members, such as retired individuals. There are questions for officials, such as why this does not apply to retired individuals who used to pay into the pension plan. The Bloc Québécois prefers to ask all these questions in committee.

Generally, however, I can tell you that this bill improves everything to do with the management of private pension plans and could have prevented certain problems of management and responsibility. If provisions such as these had been available in the past, a number of disputes over private pension plans could have been resolved. I am thinking of Singer employers, among others.

I will conclude by saying that, in the course of its work, the Standing Committee on Finance will try to obtain answers to these questions. With reservations, we are in agreement with the general thrust of this bill.

• (1620)

[English]

Hon. Lorne Nystrom (Qu'Appelle, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I also want to say a few words in the debate, not for any longer than my colleague in the Bloc Québécois.

I want to register a very general complaint. Once again we have a bill here that originates in the unelected Senate. In the name of democracy I do not think that is a very wise practice and I do not think it is a practice that would be supported by the overwhelming majority of the Canadian people.

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There are many dedicated individuals in the Senate but the fact remains that it is a non-democratic house, a non-democratic legislative body. Over the years going back in the history of the CCF and NDP and more recently joined by the Reform Party, they objected to this kind of practice in the House of Commons where a bill that should originate in the House of Commons originates in the other place, in the Senate of Canada.

The bill before the House today is an administrative bill and a highly technical bill. The main debate on the bill should be done before the committee at the committee stage.

Bill S-3 is an act to amend the Pension Benefits Standards Act, 1985 and also the Office of the Superintendent of Financial Institutions Act. The bill was first introduced under a different name. It was called Bill C-85 in the last parliament and it was introduced in March of 1997. When the writs dropped for the election on April 27, 1997 all legislation at that time ceased to exist as the Parliament of Canada was dissolved.

This bill has been reintroduced and was passed by the Senate on November 20, 1997 and here it is now in the House of Commons.

The bill covers a number of things. First of all, it governs private pension plans set up for employees working in businesses under federal jurisdiction. I think of the interprovincial transportation companies and telecommunication companies. I also think of the Canadian chartered banks and any other institutions under federal jurisdiction.

It does not cover MP pensions or pensions of federal public servants. It covers only private sector pension plans of companies under the jurisdiction of the federal government.

Bill S-3 would also introduce to the Pension Benefits Standards Act the same philosophy that governs the changes to legislation governing federal chartered financial institutions in Canada. That of course is of interest now with the talk regarding the merging of big Canadian banks.

The second part of the bill would deal with the office of the superintendent of financial institutions. It would basically enhance the powers of this office to supervise a pension plan in this country.

There are a number of details in the bill in general that can summarize it. It seeks to clarify ground rules for housekeeping and codify the rules of how to handle controversial issue of the treatment of surplus assets on pension plans. It restores a better balance between the employer and those who benefit from the plan. It enhances the ability of the minister to enter into agreements with provinces to apply and enforce provinces' pension legislation. It sets a prudent person approach as long as the definition of a prudent

person remains broadly based. That is really the general purpose of the bill, very administrative and very technical.

I want to at this time without going into detail, flag a number of concerns we have in the New Democratic Party of Canada. Regulations can be drafted by order in council that would unnecessarily pass the parliamentary process. In other words, we are handing too much power to the bureaucrats, a few unelected officials, to draft legislation that is never scrutinized by the House of Commons or by the appropriate parliamentary committee. That is a major concern for us. All too often as parliamentarians we cede too much of our power and authority as law makers of the land to bureaucrats who, despite their good intentions, draft regulations that are accountable to no one. Even the minister and her office would be at a loss to explain the regulations. It could change the whole intent of the bill. We have seen that happen many times in the past.

• (1625)

We are concerned about the solvency ratio in the bill. The solvency ratio is much too high. That is something we should get into at the committee stage.

We are concerned about a number of other things. There is the question of a surplus withdrawal. The whole process seems to be very sloppy and incoherent.

Those are some of our concerns. We look forward to pursuing this bill in committee. Unless the parliamentary secretary and the assistant whip can elaborate on the details of the bill, we will pursue this at the committee stage.

Ms. Marlene Catterall (Ottawa West—Nepean, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. Discussions have taken place between the parties. I believe you will find consent for the following motion:

That, if a recorded division is requested later this day on second reading of Bill S-3, the said division shall be deemed deferred until Tuesday, April 28, 1998 at the end of the time provided for Government Orders.

(Motion agreed to)

Mr. Ken Epp (Elk Island, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to try to persuade all members present that we should give careful consideration to what we are doing here today. I could say I am standing here as part of the body of sober second thought. Usually that terminology is applied to the Senate but since the bill started in the Senate and has already been passed by the Senate, its sober second thought has become the first thought, and so here we are giving it sober second thought in this Chamber.

The unelected Senate has done another wonderful thing for us. It has now reversed the roles of the House of Commons and its own august chamber. I object to that. I am sure thousands and maybe millions of Canadians do. It is time we straightened that Senate up.

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I might not object if the senators had been elected, if the people would have had a voice to say which one gets in there. Instead the prime minister of the day appoints whoever happens to have the best party credentials. Then that person becomes a senator. The other thing that is so unconscionable about that is that senator never has to go back to the people nor to the prime minister to be accountable. We saw that recently. The prime minister who has the right to appoint senators has no right to right to dis-appoint them. I use that term advisedly. Even the prime minister who appoints them cannot hold them accountable.

There is a large flaw in a democratic system when we break that circle of accountability. In a circle everyone is accountable to the person either in front or behind them. That is what happens in a democracy. As a member of Parliament I am responsible to the people in my riding. In return, those people are responsible to correctly choose and direct their member of Parliament so we get good laws in this country. The citizens are in that circle of responsibility.

It is unfortunate when the prime minister appoints a Senate and the Senate ends up initiating laws like this because the circle of accountability is broken. We should not be surprised when that happens, that we have laws that are not as good as they could be.

I will talk about the amendments to the Pension Benefits Standards Act, the bill we are debating today.

• (1630)

I have a little problem suppressing my cynicism. What we have here is a government that is proposing to strengthen the role of the superintendent of pension administration. The superintendent is the person who oversees the building of pension funds in the public and private sectors across the country.

The federal government is appointing a superintendent to oversee pension funds, presumably providing protection for the pension funds of employees and employers but mostly on behalf of employees.

One needs to ask what kind of credentials the government can display. Since 1966 one of the largest pension funds in the country has been the Canada pension plan. It was started by the Liberals. Right from the beginning as data were gathered and statistical information became available it was underfunded. When the Conservatives were nine years in power they did not correct it. The Liberals have been in power for a number of years. That pension fund has been administered in such a way that its present unfunded liability is currently about equal to our national debt, both of which are shameful.

It is true that the national debt is a little bigger. We have about \$580 billion of debt that we owe directly because government was borrowing. However, if one were to do the actuarial mathematical calculation to see what kind of money is now needed to fulfil all

future obligations of the Canada pension plan, one would see the amount of shortfall is in the neighbourhood of \$500 billion, an astronomical number. Yet the government starts a bill in the Senate that says we need a superintendent of pension funds.

I agree on behalf of employees that we need to have the assurance that when pension funds are contributed by employers and employees they are properly managed and properly invested. An accounting should be done. There should be proper security of those funds so that no one can abscond with the money. In the event that businesses run into hard times there need to be protections against those businesses reaching into their pension funds, which really belong to the employees, to try to bail themselves out. We need those regulations.

I agree but, as I said earlier, part of me has trouble suppressing my cynicism when the same government says that it should supervise pension funds so that everything goes well and it has such a terrible track record with its own pension fund, the Canada pension plan.

In this instance I think right now that I will support the measures being proposed in the bill. Of course I object that the bill did not start up here, but so be it.

Most of the measures in the bill are needed and I want to support it. I have a concern with sections of the act that state the superintendent, under the authority of the minister, has the powers to do these different things.

Some of the powers are very important. Anybody who reads the act will see that the superintendent, for example, has the right to demand that any new pension fund be registered with his office within 60 days. That is a perfectly fine and acceptable requirement.

• (1635)

This is a way of providing some assurance and some security for employees who are paying into the pension fund. It helps everybody involved in administering the fund to be accountable to someone. There we come back to the question of accountability again.

I have some real serious concerns on behalf of people who work all their lives. When they approach retirement age they suddenly find the things they were planning on have evaporated right under their noses.

I know of a family back in my riding where that happened. This man worked hard in a company for many years. He was about four or five years away from retirement age when the company, how do I put it politely, spun into the ground. It dug itself into a hole. The bosses decided they would try to do some interim financing by borrowing from the pension fund, which on the surface seemed okay at that time. It would have been okay if it would have been a temporary loan, if the company would have recovered and put the money back.

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In this instance it became impossible for the company to do so. I am not even sure there was anything illegal about what it was doing at the time. I do not know those details. However it took the pension money to try to bail itself out. The company still went under. Now the employees, including the person I know who was five years away from retiring, suddenly lost their jobs because the company quit and their pension fund evaporated with it. Now he is dependent on Canada pension for which he is eligible. It is really a drastic situation when people who pay into these funds for years and years cannot trust them.

I guess the beginning and the end of what I was to say is included in these statements. We need to make sure as legislators that we implement rules and we set up regulations correctly. I am grateful that in the House of Commons we have the scrutiny of regulations committee. When the superintendent, under the authority of the minister, makes regulations that apply to the administration of pension funds, the regulations are subject to the scrutiny of the House committee. Hopefully that will give Canadians a little more security in the assurance that their pensions funds will be there for them.

I have problems with some of the powers being given to the superintendent. In some instances they seem to be arbitrary. I have additional anxiety about a superintendent being responsible only to the minister.

I can make an outrageous statement here and I am sure I will not hear a voice of protest from them. Ministers in the present government do not always answer questions in question period. When we ask a question about something usually we get a runaround. Usually we get some vicious attack on our party, even maybe saying that we are not being very nice to ask such a question instead of giving us the facts.

What we have here is a superintendent who is answerable to the minister, but who can ever force the minister to be answerable to anyone?

I would like to see a real demand for openness in pension funds. Some of that is included in the bill. It begins a process. Perhaps it does not go far enough, but it requires that the superintendent get information.

I would like to make sure that everyone with a vested interest in the pension fund, whether it is an individual employee or someone even more distantly interested in the pension fund because of administrative procedures and so on, should have access to the records and administrative procedures being used in the administration of the pension fund.

I conclude by simply saying that the administration of pension funds is most important. We are living in an age in which many of us live longer. I come from a family where people live terribly

long. I do not know whether I will keep up the family tradition but I expect to do so. That is true for many of us.

• (1640)

I remember as a young man at university studying mathematics, statistics, actuarial tables and things like that. Back then the actuarial tables we used had a life expectancy for a Canadian male of around 62 years. Now that dates me because those are very old tables. The life expectancy for males in Canada is approaching 80 years and for females it is even higher.

We now live longer in that period of time in our lives when we usually do not have jobs. We have retired and are depending on our retirement income. It is incumbent on the government to do what it needs to do so that there is openness and accountability. Pension funds need to be well administered. People need to have confidence in them. They need the government to actually deliver the funds that are expected when they retire.

[*Translation*]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. McClelland): It is my duty, pursuant to Standing Order 38, to inform the House that the questions to be raised tonight at the time of adjournment are as follows: the hon. member for Charlotte, Health; the hon. member for Sackville—Eastern Shore, The Atlantic Groundfish Strategy; the hon. member for Edmonton East, Merchant navy veterans.

[*English*]

Hon. Lorne Nystrom (Qu'Appelle, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have two questions for my friend in the Reform Party. I applaud what he said about the bill being introduced in the Senate. I said similar things a few minutes earlier. We therefore certainly agree on that and I would like to elaborate for a minute or so.

This practice started decades and decades ago. Over the last few years it has escalated, which concerns me. When I was first elected in 1968 it was extremely rare that the government would introduce a bill through the Senate. If that were to happen, the Hon. Stanley Knowles would rise in the House and object to it. The practice now is becoming more and more common, which concerns me as a democrat. I am talking about a democrat in a democratic process.

Would the member across the way think that the Senate should be abolished? Do we need that other place, or do we form an elected Senate? The problem with forming an elected Senate, having gone through a constitutional process, is that it is very difficult to come up with a national agreement that would carry in the country. As long as we hold out a dream of electing it and reforming it we might be stuck with the unelected Senate.

I went through the Charlottetown process, the Meech Lake process, the parliamentary committees of the House where there was all party consensus and so on, and the most difficult issue was always the Senate. Triple E sounds very nice in principle, but the province of Quebec is unique and distinct with 25% of the people. The huge province of Ontario has 38% of the people. There are

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many small provinces. We are a federation with 65% or 70% of our people in two of the ten provinces. Therefore it makes it very difficult to reach an agreement on an equal Senate. Ontario and Quebec do not agree to it because of their size.

If the provinces agree to an equal Senate as suggested in the Charlottetown accord, the powers of that Senate would be diminished. Then what would be the purpose of the Senate? I get back to how we put a round peg in a square hole and ask whether or not the member has some advice for the House.

My other question is on the substance of the bill. I am concerned that the powers of the Office of the Superintendent of Financial Institutions are to be enhanced.

Would the member deal in more detail than he did with the types of powers he thinks will be negative in terms of enhancement and the move away from accountability by the House of Commons of the Office of the Superintendent of Financial Institutions?

The issue is becoming more and more an issue of sensitivity as we are looking at the big bank mergers that are coming down. I know this does not affect banks, but it affects people working in private sector companies across the country that are regulated by federal law and jurisdiction such as our major chartered banks.

I know the member is an expert in this area so I would be interested in hearing him go into detail in terms of the powers he is concerned about being enhanced. I certainly agree with him that we are handing too many powers to that official and that office without the scrutiny of Parliament. This whole process should be democratized. Accountability is extremely important in public life and politics.

• (1645)

On the Senate, how do we put that round peg in a square hole? My second question is with regard to the powers of the office of the superintendent of financial institutions.

Mr. Ken Epp: Mr. Speaker, I will deal with the second question first because it is going to be the shorter of the two. That pertains to the accountability of this particular superintendent.

According to the bill, this superintendent is actually going to have the right to subpoena. He is going to have the right of the court to demand the presentation of documents and he can seize pension funds and put them under his own administration if in his view there is an improper application or administration of those funds. That is a formidable power. There is a lot of money in some of

these funds and it is a very great power. That is exactly what I was talking about. How do you make it more accountable?

My answer is simply this. Right now he or she is accountable to the minister. I would like to see a change in our standing orders that requires that the minister answer specific questions. Sometimes in question period members of the opposition ask rhetorical questions and they deserve a rhetorical answer. Sometimes there are very specific questions asked and these should be something in question period or through some other mechanism of the House where members can get right down to the facts.

Whether it is the Canadian Wheat Board, whether it is any one of the other crown corporations or one of the superintendents in the regulators of the government, the idea of openness and accountability has to be the best protection that can be given to the public.

I am very concerned when even our own Access to Information Act usually gives more whiteouts than it does information. It has to be changed because that is where the accountability is. People are not going to do illegal and wrong things if they know they are going to be found out. The temptation to try it is too great if there are easy ways to hide it.

I am now going to address the issue of the Senate. I could speak for an hour on this topic but I will limit it. The question has to do with the Senate. The NDP wants to abolish the Senate. This is wrong. That is the last thing we need.

In the House 60% of the representatives come from Quebec and Ontario. Everybody else outside of those two provinces feels like a second class citizen. In the west we can say it does not matter who is elected because the election is decided by the time the ballots are cast. Of course now with the new elections act the timing is changed, but even then we do not have the power to elect majority members in this House.

If the Senate is abolished and there is only this place and it is based on representation by population, which is proper, the rest of the country is going to continue to be in distress because it could never have a substantial influence on the final outcome of things. The country would keep on getting things like that dastardly national energy program which so affected the west and still does. The west is still reeling from that all these years later.

The member asks how are we going to get a constitutional approval for a Senate. I appeal to the goodness of people. It is heard over and over again that Canadians are such wonderful people, thoughtful, helpful, generous and that is true. Even the NDP members are very generous, albeit usually with other people's money, but they have a generous heart. This should be approached properly by saying this country has a true bicameral system, a

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House of Commons and a Senate where the representation is of the people based on population. Every 100,000 people would have a member of Parliament who occupies a seat on behalf of those people. The Senate would represent the provinces equally.

• (1650)

If senators were truly elected and representative and equal in numbers per province, they would have legitimacy and the right to introduce bills such as this one. They could introduce legislation and bring it here. Or they could have proper veto rights or amendment rights to bills that are introduced here and sent over there.

I cannot believe that my fellow Canadians in Ontario and Quebec would say that they are so selfish that they will never give up that power. Right now they have it. There are 24 senators in Ontario, 24 in Quebec, 10 in New Brunswick, 10 in Nova Scotia. B.C., the third most populated province, has six. That is wrong.

If we tell them, if we appeal to their goodness, do members not think that eventually we would come to the point where, out of the goodness of their hearts, they would say they believe in fairness? That is a way of achieving it. Let us have an equal number, maybe six senators per province, maybe ten. Now the powers are balanced.

That is my goal. That is one of the reasons I was attracted to the Reform Party. Having representation by population in both Houses as it is now, but even then distorted, introduces such an inequity that it perpetuates a feeling of dissatisfaction and disunity in the country. This proposal would add greatly to our feelings of unity of co-operation as fellow Canadians. It would be a wonderful change. We should never think of abolishing that honourable place, the Senate. Let us make it honourable. Let us make it truly honourable by electing it.

Mrs. Michelle Dockrill (Bras d'Or, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I concur with my colleague from Qu'Appelle with respect to where this piece of legislation has initiated. If it is all right with the Speaker I would like to talk about why I believe this piece of legislation will not improve pension benefits for senior citizens.

Not acting on opportunities to improve pensions and therefore benefits simply adds to the financial struggles of too many vulnerable people. It is beyond me how this can be the goal of any Canadian government. If the letters I am getting from seniors are any indication, the government will have a lot of explaining to do during the next election.

This bill is part and parcel of the government's piecemeal approach to updating the public pension system. The entire set of proposals from the Canada pension to senior benefits has met with opposition from the business community and seniors. The seniors

benefit proposal has universally been characterized as too complicated and unworkable by financial planners.

Maybe that is why the finance department has been up to its elbows in a redesign that has no end in sight. The cornerstone of this half finished pension reform is an unqualified failure and the entire policy has no integrity. The finance minister knows that seniors are watching every stumble.

The bill before us provided an opportunity to diminish the government's attack on older Canadians who have claimed what author John Myles calls the citizen's right to cease work before wearing out.

However, in Bill S-3 the government is proposing a mechanism to take the surplus out of private pension plans rather than offer incentives to improve pension plans. This is the wrong message to send. The government's role is simply to do what it can to add to the quality of life of citizens. It can do so by encouraging the improvement and strengthening of pension funds in an attempt to increase benefits.

Pensions and medicare have institutionalized the concept of retirement. Imagine a society where retirement is not institutionalized, where we are not granted the right to a peaceful time in our final years, free from the struggle of the labour market. We have this right today and cutting pensions is an attempt to take that away. To deinstitutionalize retirement, destroying the institution of retirement one pension cut at a time means a person never stops working regardless of age or health.

• (1655)

The evidence is irrefutable that the private sector does not provide enough money by age 65 to create a suitable retirement nest egg for the vast majority of Canadians. This is why there has been consistent public pressure throughout the 20th century for the government to step in. Now it is stepping back from that mandate and the result is clear.

If hon. members go to fast food restaurants and shopping malls they will see some seniors who want to be working, but they will mostly see seniors who have no choice but to stay on the job.

The destruction of retirement, one pension cut at a time, is big brother's right wing dream of social engineering, a sick utopia being administered by the finance department. Canadians do not want the finance department carrying out centrally planned social engineering experiments on their senior citizens. They want pensions the way they were working well before these experiments became so fashionable in corporate and government boardrooms.

If there is one constant theme in the government's scorched earth campaign against the long held Canadian consensus in favour of public pensions it is a complete lack of interest in making life better for seniors. We have seen it with the Canada pension plan where seniors' hopes for a little more money so some can literally

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turn up the heat another degree next winter were put through the shredder at the finance department. Hopefully it is using the same shredder on the proposed seniors benefit.

The seniors benefit is like some foul monster worthy of the *X Files* television program, speaking a language that even financial planners cannot understand and striking fear into the hearts of seniors everywhere.

Again the government is slashing benefits by cancelling the old age security and guaranteed income supplement and letting loose the cynically titled seniors benefit.

It should be pointed out that although the government's plan to institute a seniors benefit has been stopped dead in its tracks at least for a while, this did not come about because the government was sensitive to the needs of seniors. The government was unmoved by the outcry from seniors groups and their disbelief on seeing the planned benefit.

No, it was the outcry of wealthy Canadians through their financial planners who said this plan makes it difficult to organize the complicated financial affairs of better off retirees. This group saw the losses involved and together with lower income Canadians delivered a universal message. Thankfully this wretched seniors benefit has been put on hold, and that is the strength of universality.

A nation is not a thing to be divided and conquered by its own government. We are a nation of citizens who deserve to be treated with equal respect. Universality is about equality and balance and the government's approach to destroy universality by expanding means testing for pensions through the seniors benefit has simply upset the fine balance of universality and equality born from the Canadian soul and enshrined in the institution of retirement that we have erected as a symbol of our nation. To dismantle these things is to dismantle Canada.

Bill S-3 has some good intentions. The bill strives to set clear ground rules for housekeeping, restores a better balance between the employer and those who benefit from the pension plan and enhances the ability of the minister to enter into agreements with provinces to apply and enforce a province's pension legislation.

However, the bill also adds unaccountable power to bureaucrats in the name of lowering costs and only addresses the issue of taking a surplus out of a pension fund. This is what most seniors and future seniors are concerned with.

Bill S-3 is an opportunity for the government to address the need to use the surplus wisely. There could have been something in the legislation which encourages pension fund managers to find constructive ways to use any surplus, to perhaps leave the surplus

in a fund for the good of those who receive benefits. But the legislation does not do that, which is a shame.

• (1700)

We should be improving benefits or striving to improve benefits. After all, the goal here is to improve the quality of life of our senior citizens.

The government cannot even be bothered to appear to be striving to improve benefits. Clearly, a discussion on how to use any surplus for the good of beneficiaries is lacking in this bill.

Canadians are a prudent people. We like to know there is money in the bank for a rainy day. Statistics show that for the vast majority of seniors old age is that rainy day.

In December Statistics Canada announced a 2% rise in the rate of seniors' poverty over many years of decline, largely attributed to the long established pensions in the country. However, that is not the most telling statistic.

I will quote from a StatsCan report. It states:

A large percentage of the elderly population have incomes near the low income cut-offs. Consequently, rates for seniors are particularly sensitive to small income shifts. The rise in the elderly low income rate reflects the fact that more seniors fell just short of the cut-offs.

Senior citizens are hanging on by a thread in a world where governments are cutting pensions. The government is making cheaper medicine more difficult to obtain and social assistance for the victims of this wild west economy is being rolled up into meaningless tax cuts just so the wealthy can smoke a few more cigars.

The StatsCan report of just five months ago, three days before Christmas, makes it clear that seniors are amassing on the last rung of the economic ladder. It reminds me of the hundreds of thousands of refugees amassing in the city of Dunkirk during the second world war with nowhere to go, looking across the sea for any sign of hope.

This government has millions of economic refugees staring at it through wizened eyes and all the government can think about is who will blink first. It is shameful. This is not about blinking, it is about eating and staying healthy and warm.

There was recently an elderly gentleman from Cape Breton who had to resort to a public plea over radio for help. Unable to pay for his expensive heart medication and facing a refusal for help from the cash starved provincial health plan, the man said he expected to die the next day.

Faced with a member of their community dying in such appalling circumstances, Cape Bretoners responded, as they always do in Atlantic Canada, with generosity. The senior is now being taken care of, but for how long?

What about the thousands of others we know are suffering the same indignities across this country? If the government does not care about them, who will? It will not be multinational drug companies or the multinational insurance corporations. I doubt it will be the banks who are bent on service charging senior citizens right into the grave. The banks are probably the ones who came up with the phrase "You can't take it with you".

This is the job of the government. If the government is going to treat people the way corporations do, then why have a government? It seems the marketplace is crowded with organizations trying to figure out ways to get their hands on people's money in exchange for nothing but promises and apologies.

Seniors were not born yesterday. They know the government should return to its only market niche of good government, adding to the quality of life of its citizens. Why will the government not through this legislation encourage pension managers to search for ways to increase benefits and help seniors become more independent? This bill makes the improvement of pension plans unlikely and that makes seniors and future seniors less secure. So why bother?

It is part of this government's disturbing pattern of behaviour in the area of pensions. Why did this government announce it was going to cancel the old age security and guaranteed income supplement which Canadians knew they could use as a building block for their retirement, a building block that would not shrink every time they earned a dollar of their own through an RRSP or some other form of investment? Why does the government plan to replace it with a seniors benefit which will give a couple about \$18,000 and then take away every dollar of seniors benefit for every dollar earned?

• (1705)

It seems that the government has taken its cue from thieves lurking around banking machines, lying in wait for senior citizens. Seniors are only withdrawing their own money paid through pension contributions and taxes.

Why is the government forcing seniors to work harder, making it harder for them to earn money for their final years, and then taking away their pension, dollar for dollar, with the seniors benefit? Why has the government put senior citizens on a treadmill? Senior citizens do not need to be on a treadmill. They have worked hard all their lives. They have paid taxes. They have defended this country, with their lives in many instances. They have raised families, built businesses, passed on their lessons learned and made their communities better places for all of us. After all that, all the government can come up with in terms of social policy for seniors is to put them on a treadmill.

I think the finance minister needs an education. He needs to learn that senior citizens have a right to cease work and he has a responsibility to ensure that when the private sector uses them up

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and throws them away it is his responsibility to take them in and thank them for the contribution they have made to this country. That is his job.

We are compassionate people and a Canadian government devoid of compassion is un-Canadian. This is the unseverable cord of this nation's definition of patriotism.

The Minister of Finance says that all of these pension initiatives are designed to maintain the viability of benefits for seniors. If he can maintain them, then he can surely role up his sleeves, get to work and go one step further to improve them. If he does not like the idea of improving benefits, he should step aside and allow someone else who has the stomach for the job to do it.

How can anyone not be interested in caring for the elderly in this country? How can you say no to that? How can you not want to improve pensions and benefits and improve the lives of our wonderful senior citizens?

People who cannot bring themselves to care for senior citizens should think of this. We are all pretending here. We are all senior citizens. We run pensions at our own peril. We are hurting ourselves because we all have our senior years to look forward to. That is who we are hurting when this House passes legislation like the recent downsizing of the Canada pension plan benefits program and, God forbid, the seniors benefit.

How can the government on the one hand slash the Canada pension plan, old age security and the guaranteed income supplement by claiming it is running out of money and then present this bill today with no encouragement to improve pension funds? Is that how we want to teach our children to handle finances? As soon as you get ahead, just throw your money away.

The government is speaking out of both sides of its mouth and seniors have stopped listening. The government should give senior citizens a little more credit.

Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I know there are other members who are waiting to give speeches, but I would like to ask the member one brief question.

Is the member aware that the old age security and GIS programs are in fact not being cancelled? Is the member aware that if a person was 60 years of age or older as of December 31, 1995 they would continue to receive the old age security and the GIS, or that they would have the option to transfer to the senior's benefit if in fact that was in their best interest?

I want to know if the member is aware that those programs are not being cancelled.

Mrs. Michelle Dockrill: Mr. Speaker, in response to the member's question, yes, I am aware of that.

I would like to say that a lot of my comments today have come from the perspective of senior citizens whom I have both talked

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with and received correspondence from in terms of their concern for their future with all of these changes that the government has proposed.

Hon. Lorne Nystrom (Qu'Appelle, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have a comment that I would like to make which arises out of what my friend from Mississauga South stated. The member made a comment about the seniors benefit.

• (1710)

One of the concerns that I have about the seniors benefit is that I think we are going to end all pretence of universality in this country and that really concerns me as a citizen.

It is very ironic that the Minister of Finance is the son of one of the founders of the national social programs in this country, along with people like Stanley Knowles and other members of the New Democratic Party.

With the seniors benefit, if someone earns a few dollars, they will lose money in terms of their seniors benefit. After they earn a few more dollars, they will lose even more money. After a certain level it will all be gone.

Therefore, people who have saved money for their retirement, who have a middle-class income, all of a sudden will not have a seniors benefit. I am talking about people who were not 60 years of age by the year 1995.

If that happens we will basically have a welfare program and there will be a lack of political support for that program. It will become more and more of a welfare program. There will be a means test and an end to universality.

What a legacy for the Liberal Party of Canada to leave this country. Here is a party which used to pretend in opposition that it was a progressive party which stood up for ordinary citizens. It talked about social programs and the redistribution of wealth in this country.

Here is a party that makes Brian Mulroney look like a raving socialist. It even makes you, Mr. Speaker, look like a raving socialist. I am sure that you would not even advocate, coming from a very progressive Edmonton background, the end of universality for pensions in this country. We have a Liberal Party that is a throwback to the conservatism of the last century. It wants to end universality.

I want to know whether the member for Bras d'Or agrees with me or not.

Mrs. Michelle Dockrill: Mr. Speaker, that is a really taffy question. Certainly I agree with my colleague.

One of the things I would like to make a point on concerns the people of Bras d'Or.

As I have said in this Chamber on numerous occasions with respect to the problems that are occurring both in Bras d'Or and in

Atlantic Canada, what we are finding is that our population is aging rapidly and we have a serious problem with respect to the exodus of our young people.

Contrary to what we hear from the other side of this House, I am not aware of very many jobs that are being created at my end of the country. Therefore, our young people are leaving at a very rapid rate.

As the seniors critic, I am doubly concerned with respect to what is happening with our population in Bras d'Or and how those people perceive these changes will affect them.

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

Some hon. members: Question.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. McClelland): Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

(Motion agreed to, bill read the second time and referred to a committee)

Ms. Marlene Catterall (Ottawa West—Nepean, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. I think you would find consent in the House to see the clock as being 5.30 p.m. so that we may move to Private Members' Business.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. McClelland): Do we have unanimous consent to see the clock as being 5.30 p.m.?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. McClelland): For the benefit of those in the gallery I will take a second to explain what is going on.

Normally the House proceeds to Private Members' Business at 5.30 p.m. However, because the House has finished its scheduled business early there has been a request to see the clock as being 5.30 p.m. and we need unanimous consent to do that.

This is why, even though it is not 5.30 p.m., I say "It being 5.30 p.m., the House will now proceed to the consideration of Private Members' Business, as listed on today's Order Paper".

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

• (1715)

[English]

LABELLING OF TOYS

The House resumed from March 16 consideration of the motion.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. McClelland): There are more members who wish to speak than there is time for. We have 45 minutes, which includes 5 minutes for responses, which may or may not be

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applied in this circumstance. Given that there are more people who wish to speak than time allows for, I remind members that they do not have to take 10 minutes just because they have 10 minutes at their disposal.

Mr. Gary Lunn (Saanich—Gulf Islands, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, we are talking about Motion No. 85 brought forward by the NDP member for Acadie—Bathurst. The motion concerns the labelling of toys that contain phthalates. There is apparently scientific evidence to suggest this substance causes cancer.

I have not followed the research on this topic but I am sure the member has done his research. If there are toy companies that produce toys containing phthalates, I would agree with the member wholeheartedly that there should be legislation that these toys must be labelled.

I am not an expert. I am reading only from a few reports. It is the first I have heard that phthalates cause cancer. Someone even suggested to me that these toy companies actually produce soothers containing this substance which are used by infants. I find that absolutely amazing. History has shown this is not the first time horrifying things have happened.

Providing that the science is correct, I would speak in support of this motion. I have to go further and say that we should ban something like this and not just label it. I give a qualified yes because I obviously have not done the research. I am not challenging the research done by the member. I read that tests conducted in U.K. laboratories reveal widespread presence of phthalates in soft plastic toys and other products, particularly teething rings.

A September 1997 report on the subject concludes that the primary problem is that phthalates leaking from these products are being ingested by children. Phthalates are indeed toxic and Greenpeace has been effective in lobbying European toy manufacturers and distributors to pull some of these products off the shelves.

I have two small children at home, a two-year old and a four-year old. I see some eyebrows raised. I am not that old. I am young enough to have a two-year old and a four-year old. I think there are a few grey hairs but I am trying to fight those. There are problems with toys which I have seen even in the few years we have been dealing with this.

I would support the member in this initiative. It is a qualified yes. Unless somebody can tell me differently I would be very in favour of it. I thank the member for bringing this motion before the House.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Nick Discepola (Parliamentary Secretary to Solicitor General of Canada, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure to speak in

response to the motion put forward by the hon. member for Acadie—Bathurst regarding phthalates contained in plastic toys.

• (1720)

The hon. member's motion states that the government should enact legislation mandating toy manufacturers to label toys containing phthalates in order to allow parents to make an informed decision when buying products for their children.

It seems to me that this no doubt well-intentioned motion is somewhat premature. The fact is that there is no conclusive evidence linking all phthalates in toys to health risks for children. In fact, my predecessor already inquired about this, and there has never been a reported case of a child experiencing ill effects from phthalates in this country or anywhere else. That is why the government is not supporting this motion at this time, which does not mean that the government is taking the matter lightly. Quite the contrary.

Health Canada officials are currently investigating the potential health risks of phthalates in polyvinyl chloride or PVC plastic toys.

If at any time clear evidence of health risks from phthalates are established, appropriate action will immediately be taken to protect the health of Canadian children.

Health Canada's investigation of potential health risks from phthalates includes ongoing information exchange with the department's counterparts in the United States and in Europe, with industry, advocacy groups and health associations, as well as a comprehensive literature assessment on the potential toxicity of phthalates.

As part of this investigation, Health Canada officials have undertaken a scientific risk assessment on phthalates in various PVC plastic products. Specifically, they are trying to determine the presence of potentially toxic substances and conducting tests to see if these substances can in fact be absorbed by children.

The department has developed a test protocol and is currently assessing polyvinyl chloride products to validate test procedures. Test results should soon be available to help determine the risks represented by phthalates.

Two of the most valuable tools at the government's disposal are the Hazardous Products Act and the Hazardous Products (Toys) Regulations, which are both administered by the Products Safety Bureau of Health Canada. The legislation in effect totally bans the sale of certain toys while others are not allowed on the market until they meet certain very precise safety standards.

The mission of Health Canada's Product Safety Bureau is to prevent deaths and injuries linked to the use of products. In order to reduce the potential dangers of products intended for children and

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to promote their safe use, the Bureau operates on a number of levels, particularly by enacting legislation, setting standards and informing consumers.

The Bureau's activities dovetail with those of Health Canada's national information and education program. Child safety and the prevention of injuries linked to the use of consumer products constitute one of the program's key objectives.

I am certain that Health Canada's sound research, coupled with dialogue and consultation with governments, industry and NGOs, will make it possible to clarify the issue and constitute a solid and informed basis for measures the Government of Canada might take in future in this connection.

This well thought out approach reflects Health Canada's decision to have a solid and informed assessment of the risks in order to gain an understanding of the complex health issues, and to act accordingly, especially where children are concerned.

In reacting in a rigorous and thorough manner to this potential health hazard, we are following up on an ongoing government commitment to ensure the health and safety of all Canadian children.

The Health Protection Branch of Health Canada is making every effort to reduce health risks associated with the natural or artificial environment which can lead to injury or death.

• (1725)

The main responsibilities of this branch are, first, to assess and control the nutritional value, quality and safety of food products; second, to assess and control the safety and effectiveness of drugs, cosmetics, medical instruments, radiation emitting devices and other consumer products; third, to identify and assess environmental risks, and to monitor, prevent and fight diseases; and fourth, to provide laboratory services such as those required for the analysis and evaluation of plastic products containing potentially dangerous phthalates.

At the Health Protection Branch, these various programs are bound together by the government's desire to ensure the health and safety of Canadian children. Of course, this concern is shared by parents and other caregivers, public health workers, product manufacturers and retailers.

By mobilizing all available resources, knowledge and expertise and by co-operating with partners from various sectors, the government has effectively reduced potential risks to our children's safety.

I will conclude by saying that I find this to be a worthy motion, but in light of the efforts already undertaken by Health Canada and

because of the lack of information, as mentioned by the member of the Reform Party, I think it is a little premature at this time.

Mrs. Suzanne Tremblay (Rimouski—Mitis, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to speak on Motion M-85 put forward by my NDP colleague, the hon. member for Acadie—Bathurst.

The motion reads as follows:

That, in the opinion of this House, the government should enact legislation mandating toy manufacturers to label toys containing phthalates in order to allow parents to make an informed decision when buying products for their children.

I would like to thank the hon. member for Acadie—Bathurst for giving us the opportunity to discuss the safety of the manufactured products that we buy and in particular the potentially toxic products used in the production of children's toys.

Today, Earth Day, is the perfect time to ask us the following questions: In what kind of environment do we want to live? Do we want a healthy environment for our kids? Should we let companies put their profits before the quality of the products they sell? Should our governments legislate to protect our environment and ensure that the legislation is enforced?

The motion before us deals with phthalates. This is a chemical product that is used to make many plastic products more malleable. They are found in a number of children's toys among other things.

Recent scientific studies carried out in several European countries show that these products can cause cancer, liver damage and infertility. These same studies indicate that children, particularly preschoolers, are more vulnerable.

The Vinyl Council of Canada and the Canadian Toy Manufacturers' Association have denied that phthalate-containing toys are dangerous. They have asked that any decision be postponed pending the results of a study underway at Health Canada. But it could take Health Canada months if not years to examine all toys and determine which ones release phthalates. It could take this department a long time to determine the acceptable level of this product in toys.

Why are manufacturers putting people's health at risk by waiting to withdraw their products until phthalates have been proven dangerous? By that time, parents could end up with sick children, and the government would have to bear the cost of any health services needed to restore them to health or to treat them for permanent damage.

Last December, Denmark's environment minister condemned the industry for trying so hard to deny any problems with phthalates instead of looking for safer alternatives. Other substances could be used to make plastic more malleable. Why not use substances that are recognized as safer?

• (1730)

In several countries such as Denmark, the Netherlands, Sweden, Argentina, Spain, Belgium, and Italy, stores have voluntarily withdrawn these toys at the request of governments as a preventive measure. This has involved losses for them, but they believed that children's health was more important.

When in doubt, the consumer's interest should always prevail. For example, it is common in the food sector to see a company withdraw all its products from the shelves because a few people got sick. It is a matter of respect for customers.

In 1997, Health Canada issued a warning because children's health could be affected by the lead contained in blinds made of polyvinyl chloride. The fact that these products had been widely distributed before it was realized that they could be dangerous shows the importance of prevention.

The motion before us today at second reading does not even demand that all phthalates be prohibited. It merely asks that a label be put on children's toys containing phthalates, since they could potentially be dangerous. This would allow parents to make an informed decision as to whether they are prepared to take the risk of having their children chew on toys that could release toxic substances. The label put on these products would not say that they are harmful, but it would inform consumers, as is the case with the labels found on all stuffed animals, cereal boxes or other consumer products.

Just this morning, *La Presse* reported that a five-year old girl was found to have a high level of lead because she kept chewing on a pendant that she received as a Christmas present. Health Canada issued a warning and the American manufacturer voluntarily withdrew the product from the market.

It is only natural for young children to put things in their mouths. It is part of their development and discovery process. This is why it is worrisome to see that teething rings, rattles and other toys that children often put in their mouth for hours may contain toxic substances.

Phthalates are dangerous products. In the laboratories where they are used, they have a label with the warning "Avoid contact". Since phthalates account for 10% to 40% of the weight of some toys, they can be mechanically released when children chew on these toys.

Studies conducted by the governments of Denmark and Holland, and by Greenpeace's laboratories in Great Britain, show that the quantities thus released largely exceed the acceptable level, up to 40 times according to the European Commission's scientific committee on toxicity, ecotoxicity and the environment, which conducted a study on a phthalate, di-iso-nonyl. These substances get into a child's saliva and then into the digestive tract, poisoning the child.

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At the present time, the manufacturers are claiming they meet Canadian standards, which is true, but in reality there are no Canadian standards for acceptable quantities of DINP phthalate or di-iso-nonyl phthalate. There is a loophole in the Hazardous Products Act, since a product not specifically listed in the act is legal, regardless of its level of toxicity.

As far as plastics are concerned, these are not regulated by the Hazardous Products Act. Thus Health Canada has no way of protecting the public from dangerous additives which may be in these plastics. Health Canada could not, therefore, ask retailers to withdraw these products.

I must, however, put the government on guard against the trend toward deregulation, which is being felt in all areas. I am totally in agreement with elimination of the over-regulation that exists in certain areas, in order to simplify and clarify the wording of legislation for the benefit of all. But eliminating red tape must not be confused with deregulation, which would lead to decreased public safety.

At a time when our health system is overburdened and experiencing financial problems, it must be realized that preventive measures will not only save considerable amounts of money, but also a great deal of suffering in the medium and long term.

A child's early years are crucial to physical and intellectual development. Young children are highly susceptible to minimal quantities of toxic substances. This is why it is so crucial to ensure they live in a healthy environment and the consumer products in this environment are safe. Healthy children will grow into active and fulfilled adults.

• (1735)

I support this motion and I ask the government to always do the utmost when people's health is at risk because of toxic substances. Human health should get more priority than corporate financial interests, even if companies try to influence the government towards more lenient regulations.

Liberal members are suggesting that the Hazardous Products Act already protects people, but, if the hon. member for Acadie—Bathurst had not raised it, the issue of phthalates in children's toys would not have been taken up by Health Canada. In a previous study, the department tested vinyl toys for the presence of lead and cadmium only.

I congratulate the hon. member for Acadie—Bathurst on his motion, and I hope it will be passed. It has already generated discussion on the safety of children's toys and forced Health Canada to study this issue.

In conclusion, the hon. member has also reminded us that we should always be on the alert and demand that public safety take precedence over the marketing of consumer products. On behalf of those children who have no voice, and as a preschool education

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professional with 35 years experience, I sincerely thank the hon. member for Acadie—Bathurst for this motion.

[*English*]

Mr. Greg Thompson (Charlotte, PC): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to speak to the following motion by the member for Acadie—Bathurst:

That, in the opinion of this House, the government should enact legislation mandating toy manufacturers to label toys containing phthalates in order to allow parents to make an informed decision when buying products for their children.

The motion was introduced following Greenpeace's allegations about additives in vinyl toys. It alleged that the phthalates esters, a common family of chemical products, represent a danger to children. It would cause any of us to be concerned when we recognize there could be a danger.

However there is an important point to make. The particular esters we are talking about have been used safely for over 40 years in toys as well as in health sensitive applications, including blood bags, catheters, IV tubing and surgical gloves.

It is not just toys that we are talking about. It is a wide range of medical products. No other plasticizer has been subjected to the same level of scrutiny and testing as the one in question here tonight.

The product we are talking about actually softens plastic and makes it pliable. That is all it does. That is why it is used in children's toys and that is why it is used in surgical tubing. Obviously that tubing is subjected to a lot of stress and has to be able to withstand it.

Last fall Health Canada released a report conducted by the product safety bureau's environmental health directorate. It concludes that the lead and cadmium present in these vinyl consumer products do not pose any significant risk to children. It is important to remember that.

More important, Health Canada has undertaken a risk assessment of phthalates and will be releasing the results of this testing very soon. In fact it should be late this spring or very early summer. In the best interest of parents and children I would suggest that we wait for the risk assessment to be done.

In all fairness, any decision to label toys should be based upon pure science. We have to depend on that. Obviously, if we do not depend upon pure science, the significance of labelling would be seriously undermined. That is the only responsible way to proceed. It has to be based on pure science and the research that is necessary to determine whether or not there is a danger. That is why we are suggesting that we should wait on that.

• (1740)

This party does not have a problem with the member's motion because it is coming from the right place, right here where it should be. The scientific evidence I have been able to gather in the last number of months points to the fact that Health Canada is taking it very seriously and we are going to wait for those results. No scientific evidence shows that there is any kind of a health risk.

I talked about our party respecting the motion and how much work the member has put into it. Our party will be the first to approve appropriate labelling, should the scientific and regulatory agency state that this chemical in question presents any kind of a risk. I want the public to know that. I want members on the government side as well as members on this side to know that.

It is important for all of us to know that some of the Danish studies which were alluded to and examined by Greenpeace have been discredited for what they call producing unrepeatable results. In the scientific world it means that results can be achieved through a certain process. If there is a problem, that should be repeatedly done proving the same stated fact at the end of the test. In this case it did not. They were also using what we consider false methodology. I am sure a few chemists in this room tonight know exactly what I am talking about.

Standards have to be put in place by Canada's health and safety bureau. There needs to be a regulatory standard for intake just as the European Union has already done in terms of the theory to put in place maximum daily intake of DINP.

Based on what we know and the scientific evidence out there, unfortunately we cannot support the motion until the necessary scientific protocols, which are important in the scientific community, have been established and Health Canada has in place regulatory powers under Health Canada's product safety bureau. That is why we are waiting. We will wait for the scientific jury to report back to us and we will make the appropriate decision at that time.

Mr. Ovid L. Jackson (Parliamentary Secretary to President of the Treasury Board, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is my pleasure to speak to Motion No. 85 in the name of the member for Acadie—Bathurst.

It is important that members have private motions such as this one when they and their constituents have major concerns. There is no question that it is important to get all the facts out.

I noted some very interesting comments from members of the Bloc and the member opposite who just spoke indicating that we have to be vigilant. We need ways and means of protecting not only our children but our society in general through Health Canada, through the kinds of processes we use, and by hearing information from our colleagues in other countries.

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There is no question that potential hazards exist from polyvinyl chlorides or PVC plastic toys, but that is not the issue. The issue, as the member before me said, is whether it is really the type of toxin advocated by Greenpeace. Is it something we should pull from the shelves? We use stringent methods of testing in order to make sure this happens.

Health Canada has been involved with the particular testing of PVCs since the 1980s. The department has taken a leadership role over the last 12 years in assessing the implications of PVCs on the health of all Canadians.

The issue is of importance to me. I have two grandchildren, one just born the day before the election. She is 10 months old. She has about two or three teeth, Mr. Speaker, which are quite sharp when you put your hands in her mouth. As the member said, this additive is something that makes things pliable. We want to make sure that it is not toxic because when we listen to people like Dr. Fraser Mustard we know now that the outcome for young children is so important. We know that from the time the child is born the parents should not be involved in smoking and they should not be involved in alcohol or any dangerous drugs that will interfere with the child. The first three years are absolutely critical, we know that. We know how the brain grows in the first six years.

• (1745)

I have been paying particular attention to a CBC program called *Grow Baby Grow* and it is fascinating to see the outcome when children are looked after properly. It makes for a much better nation, it makes for great citizens, it makes for people who will take our places when we retire and we know we will be in good hands. We need to protect our kids.

There is no question that I want to be vigilant, I want parents to be vigilant, but I also want to make sure that when these tests are done they are valid and that the science being used is not invalid and will create problems for the industry.

The issue of phthalates in children's products, especially the DEHP, has been investigated by Health Canada. It has been investigated by many foreign governments as well, including Sweden, New Zealand, England and the United States. Suffice it to say the decision on DINP will await the completion of the scientific investigation now under way by Health Canada. Preliminary results were expected this spring and we hope we will have them soon. Should investigations indicate there is a danger or a risk to children the department of course will not hesitate to pull these things off the shelf and make sure that a threat to our children does not exist.

We have to be consistent, we have to be responsible and we have to use a professional approach to the testing. The government's ongoing commitment to the health of all Canadians is extremely important. The government will listen to all the information we can

get and we will be vigilant in making sure that our citizens are protected.

I thank the member for his intervention. I think it is important that we have the debate. I cannot support the bill because, as has been said by my colleague earlier on, we want to make sure that when we pull things and put restrictions on the industry it is valid and we are using scientific information.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. McClelland): Before we resume debate we have approximately 10 minutes remaining and we have four people who would like to get a few words in. We will keep that in mind as we resume debate with the hon. member for Sydney—Victoria.

Mr. Peter Mancini (Sydney—Victoria, NDP): Mr. Speaker, bearing in mind the time constraints I will attempt to be brief, although once I am on my feet in the Chamber I sometimes find that a hard task.

Because I am speaking in support of this piece of legislation I do not think it is necessary for me to go over all the reasons why we should support it. Some of those have been enumerated by my colleague from the Bloc and my colleague from the Reform Party. Instead I will take the few moments I have to review perhaps the reasons why members of the government and members of the Conservative Party are not supporting this legislation and I think I can effectively raise some rebuttal to that.

We heard the parliamentary secretary say that at this point he cannot support labelling, and that is what we are talking about doing. We are not talking about pulling toys off shelves. We are not talking about banning them. We are talking about labelling them so that consumers who are parents buying for their children know what they are buying for those children and they can make the choice.

Members of the government have said that to date there is no conclusive evidence that it threatens the health of children, no specific cases having come forward, but that Health Canada is currently studying the situation. I think his exact words at one point were research is being done that will show the extent of the problem, not whether there is a problem but the extent of the problem. My colleague from the Conservative Party spoke against this bill because he says his party is also waiting to see if there is a significant risk.

• (1750)

We know in Europe these products have been taken off the shelves. We know there are studies in Denmark that indicate there is a risk. This debate is all too familiar. We have had this debate during question period every day for the last number of days the House has been sitting and I refer to the hepatitis C issue the Minister of Health has been grilled on. My hon. colleague from the

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Conservative Party arranged a press conference for those people who will not be compensated.

Why are some people not being compensated? The Minister of Health has said they were not testing at a particular point in time although we know and there is some evidence to suggest—and I am not going to get into that debate today, but the parallel is interesting—that Health Canada was aware that there was testing available for blood products before it was implemented in this country.

Today we have members of the Conservative Party, the Reform Party, the Bloc party and the New Democratic Party grilling the Minister of Health as to why people who became infected before that test was available or accepted by Health Canada were not compensated.

We know there is evidence in other countries that this product can be harmful to children but the government and Conservative Party want to wait until Health Canada does its own testing. Are members going to be in this House in 15 years grilling the Minister of Health about young children who today may become sick because we have not accepted the testing?

I will not use up all of the time because there are other points to be made. I encourage anyone watching this debate tonight, especially from Ontario since that is where many of the government members are from, to phone or write their member of parliament to indicate their concerns, especially parents of young children.

Mr. Larry McCormick (Hastings—Frontenac—Lennox and Addington, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this is certainly a very important motion. While it is clearly intended to protect the children from potentially hazardous products, and I do respect the work that went into this, it is simply not the most effective response. This is because the mere labelling of a product based on the presence of phthalates tells the parent nothing about the potential hazard itself. It is therefore of little use in helping parents make informed decisions.

For the label to be of use it would have to identify specific substances, how much are in the toy and what level constitutes a potential health hazard. Furthermore, the implication of this motion is that government health and safety regulations would allow dangerous products to be placed on the market with full knowledge of their potential danger.

This is not true. It was not true yesterday, today or tomorrow. If a specific toy were found to contain a hazardous product and if this product had sufficient quantities to harm a child the product would not need a warning label because the product would not be on the market. The government would have already taken steps to remove the product from the market. That is why we have the Hazardous Products Act.

This issue of vinyl plastic has received recent attention in the media following a release by Greenpeace of a report that states that phthalates used in children's products are a health risk. But here it should be noted that the product identified in both studies is known as DINP. The chemical was introduced by toy manufacturers in the United States six years ago to replace a product called DEHP which was thought to be potentially hazardous to children. Therefore the products Greenpeace refers to in its report are classic chemicals used to soften the PVC or vinyl.

Health Canada has tested these products and even expanded its testing and assessment of other plastic toys. The only toxin detected was DINP with very small amounts of DEHP. I would like to emphasize a point here that appears to have been overlooked in this motion and that is the mere presence of phthalates in a given product does not necessarily constitute a health risk.

• (1755)

Currently health officials are examining studies to assess if in fact these particular substances are toxic in this case and if they prove to be a hazard.

Certainly none of us will disagree on the intent of this motion because we are concerned about the health and safety of our children on this issue. Some of the points made during the course of this debate have created some confusion about what additives are under dispute and their effects.

However, I do believe that we now have a better appreciation of this issue and of the role Health Canada has been playing because the number one priority is our children.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Yvon Godin (Acadie—Bathurst, NDP): Mr. Speaker, these past four days, we have heard that all parties were concerned about the tainted blood issue in Canada. Health Canada and its minister have had fingers pointed at them every day. And the issue was raised during the whole week that preceded our two week recess.

Today, three very important points were raised in the debate on Motion M-85. First, the fact that members from all political parties support this initiative proves the significance of this motion, and we can understand why that is.

At first reading, everyone spoke in favour. At second reading, corporate lobbying began and a number of members started to change their tune. Most of us here, in the House of Commons, are parents, and those who are not all know children they care about. This motion touches a chord in us as parents and adults who want to keep children out of harm's way.

I have three daughters and I can tell you that, I would have wanted to know that there was a risk that some of the toys I bought

them when they were babies could cause cancer, liver damage and infertility, had it been possible at the time.

That is the problem with phthalates in plastic toys. We cannot tell which toys contain this chemical substance. This means that parents who buy a soother or a teething ring are playing Russian roulette with their children's health.

Let me outline the studies conducted internationally, which show how important it is to label toys containing phthalates. Phthalates are chemical agents used to make plastic more pliable. They are largely used in the manufacturing of pacifiers, teething rings and other flexible plastic toys.

Studies undertaken by the Danish government show that phthalates can be released when children bite into plastic toys. Swedish studies on rats show a correlation between the ingestion of phthalates and the onset of leukaemia, infertility and organ anomalies.

Also, a study carried out by the European Union concluded that the security issue raised by the phthalates known as DINP, DNOP and DEHP is cause for concern.

This debate also showed that members of the House of Commons are not the only ones concerned about the use of phthalates in plastic toys. In Denmark, the Netherlands, Sweden, Argentina, Spain, Belgium, Germany and Italy, toy manufacturers and store chains have withdrawn toys containing phthalates.

I do not have much time left, but I would like to sound a warning. There are problems with contaminated blood and if members vote against this motion, I would not want to see any of our children dying because of this three years from now. I am only asking that the label advise Canadian parents what they are buying, just as it indicates the content of carpets or other products.

If we cannot do this for our children, we should just pack it in and go home.

• (1800)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. McClelland): It being 6 p.m., the time provided for debate has expired.

Pursuant to the order made Tuesday, April 21, 1998, the motion is deemed to have been put and a recorded division deemed demanded and deferred until Tuesday, April 28, 1998, at the end of the time provided for government orders.

ADJOURNMENT PROCEEDINGS

[English]

A motion to adjourn the House under Standing Order 38 deemed to have been moved.

Adjournment Debate

HEALTH

Mr. Greg Thompson (Charlotte, PC): Mr. Speaker, I rise concerning the hepatitis C compensation package and questions I have asked the minister repeatedly in this House.

The position taken by the Government of Canada and supported by the health minister is completely untenable. The package announced by the health minister leaves 20,000 to 40,000 innocent victims outside any kind of compensation. It is unbelievable a package that would leave out 20,000 to 40,000 people would be announced.

Unfortunately it could be as high as 60,000 people because the minister the other day admitted he does not know how many people have been left outside the compensation package. This is unbelievable in a country as historically generous as Canada.

A little frame has been built around the years 1986 to 1990. Those unfortunate victims who are outside the years 1986 to 1990 would not be compensated. Persons born on December 31, 1985 would not be compensated but persons born one day later, on New Year's Day 1986, would be compensated. How can a government agree to a package that is absolutely as insane as that?

Nobody on this side of the House supports that kind of nonsense. Much to their credit there are many backbenchers on the government side of the House who cannot support it either.

I want to let the Minister of Health know that this issue is not going to go away. As long as there is a member on this side of the House, and I do not care whether the member is a Reformer, an NDP or with the Bloc, we are not going to let this issue die. In the history of Canada, and Canada is 131 years old this year, there has never been a piece of business as sad as this one. The government is being so ungenerous to so many people.

The government has found a way to buy its way out of some of the other problems it created. Remember the helicopter deal? It paid half a billion dollars just in legal fees on what we would call a cancellation clause on a botched helicopter deal. Half a billion dollars. The government paid out \$750 million, three-quarters of a billion dollars, on the failed Pearson airport deal.

A mathematical genius is not required to arrive at the number that we have on this one. Simply add half a billion and three-quarters of a billion and it is way over a billion dollars. The government found money for those botched projects but it cannot find money for innocent victims. It is unbelievable.

This issue is not going to go away. I am glad the justice critic is with me tonight. He just reminded me that the minister is the same minister who was spending half a billion dollars on gun registration, half a billion dollars on legislation we do not need in this country.

Adjournment Debate

• (1805)

The issue is not going to go away. We are going to fight it. We want changes.

Mr. Nick Discepola (Parliamentary Secretary to Solicitor General of Canada, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, on behalf of the Minister of Health I am pleased to respond to the hon. member. I would like to remind him that we are talking about people, not statistics, not numbers. We are talking about people's lives who have been affected as a result of infection through the blood system.

I would also like to remind the House that we have been guided by the desire to help these people, help them as quickly as possible and to do so on the basis of compassion and sound public policy.

We have listened to those who were affected by the blood tragedy and we listened to Justice Krever. We heard about the urgency of the situation. We heard that assistance should come and come soon and be tailored to the needs. We have since moved very quickly. We have taken action. Thirteen ministers of health have had to act and they have had to do so in a responsible manner.

I would like to take a moment to address Mr. Krever's approach to the issue. He had a very particular mandate which he fulfilled but to which he was also bound. His final report is a comprehensive and exhaustive examination of evidence and various facts. The report provides the best historical look at why the events of the past occurred, what was done and more importantly, what should be done in the future in order that we can learn from the errors of the past and learn about ways in which we should improve the blood system in the future.

The Minister of Health has an important mandate and set of responsibilities that he must take very seriously also. His provincial and territorial colleagues have mandates of their own. They have worked together to address the past. We have also worked together to build the future. We anticipate how our decisions have very serious consequences now and for the future. We are not just talking about the injuries sustained through the blood system, we are talking about all health care, medical interventions and health services.

On March 27 Canada's health ministers announced that governments were offering \$1.1 billion in assistance to Canadians infected by the hepatitis C virus.

I have run out of time, Mr. Speaker. I will discuss this with the hon. member personally.

THE ATLANTIC GROUND FISH STRATEGY

Mr. Peter Stoffer (Sackville—Eastern Shore, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I rise today on a question I asked in this House on March 25 of this year. I asked the finance minister if and when he would produce sufficient funds as recommended in the east coast report

and the Harrigan report. We are talking about TAGS and the infrastructure money required for the people of Newfoundland and Labrador and the other four Atlantic provinces.

With your indulgence, Mr. Speaker, I would like to read to this House a letter signed by five premiers of Atlantic Canada to the Prime Minister dated December 12, 1997:

“We the premiers of Canada's five eastern provinces are writing to express our concerns over the pending expiry of the Atlantic groundfish strategy, TAGS, and to call upon the Government of Canada to immediately establish a successor program to TAGS.

“As you are aware the Atlantic groundfish strategy is due to expire in May 1998. Over the past four years this program has constituted an essential lifeline for over 40,000 individuals and their families from Atlantic Canada and Quebec, individuals who through no fault of their own have seen their livelihoods and those of their families and communities challenged severely by the groundfish crisis.

“TAGS was based on two fundamental premises which have proven incorrect. First, the program was based on the expectation that key groundfish stocks would begin to recover by the time the program was due to end and commercial fisheries could be reopened by this time. This premise has proven incorrect and many of the principal groundfish stocks off Canada's east coast remain incapable of sustaining a commercial fishery.

“Second, the program was expected to bring about labour market adjustment and assist individuals in moving out of occupations tied to the traditional fishery. This has not occurred as funding for training and other adjustment initiatives had to be terminated prematurely in order to meet demands for income support which significantly exceeded initial expectations.

“The net result for these considerations is that many of the fundamental challenges which caused the federal government to establish the original TAGS program remain. Clearly, a comprehensive and effective post TAGS program is essential to the future of individuals and communities throughout Canada's five eastern provinces.

• (1810)

“Through the recent hearings of the Standing Committee on Fisheries and Oceans, of which I was a member, and through the community hearings held by the Harrigan task force, the people of Atlantic Canada and Quebec have called on the federal government to assume its responsibility for the development and implementation of an effective post-TAGS program.

“They have also stated clearly that the social and economic stress created by the fisheries crisis are continuing to represent a fundamental challenge to the future of many of our rural communi-

Adjournment Debate

ties. This challenge cannot be met effectively through normal programs of government.

“Unquestionably the urgent need to establish the effect of the post-TAGS program cannot be ignored. On behalf of the people of Atlantic Canada and Quebec we therefore call upon the government to ensure that an effective TAGS program is developed and implemented immediately”.

This is the response the government gives. Today in the House the Minister of Veterans Affairs spoke to the delegation from Newfoundland and Labrador. Some 3,000 people are to be cut off TAGS on May 8, one year premature of the originally promised date. He said to those people that there would be no program for them. They are finished. They are cut adrift.

I find that absolutely abominable and the Liberals should be ashamed of themselves for that kind of action to people who are in such a crisis.

Mr. Nick Discepola (Parliamentary Secretary to Solicitor General of Canada, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Government of Canada is aware of the profound impact of the closure of the fishery on provinces, communities and individuals especially in Atlantic Canada and Quebec.

It is now evident that fish stocks are not returning to their previous levels and we must help people adjust to an economy with a very reduced fishery.

The government is also committed to helping the people and the communities affected by the closure of the groundfishery and is prepared to deal with the situation with the same compassion and responsibility that motivated the government to implement TAGS initially in 1994. The government committed back then \$1.9 billion in benefits to help fishers and plant workers affected by the crisis in the fishery.

While the government announced that TAGS would essentially continue until the end of August this year, it recognized that action was still required. That is why Mr. Eugene Harrigan was appointed by the government to lead a review of the impact of the end of TAGS. That is also why the Standing Committee on Fisheries and Oceans undertook an investigation of the situation.

I wish to take this opportunity to acknowledge the contribution of both reports. They provide us with assessments of the post-TAGS situation and have given us important information which will prove useful as we continue working on the development of sensitive, forward looking approaches to a post-TAGS program.

In closing, I wish to assure the hon. member and the House that the government remains committed to ensuring that the transition to the post-TAGS environment is managed in a fair and sensitive

way. We recognize this is a very stressful time for fishers and plants workers and will make an announcement as soon as we can.

MERCHANT NAVY VETERANS

Mr. Peter Goldring (Edmonton East, Ref.): Mr. Speaker, in my capacity as official opposition critic for veterans affairs I wish to set the record straight. Canada's merchant navy seamen have for far too long been the victims of government bureaucracy and systemic procrastination by the Minister of Veterans Affairs.

The minister replied to my question in question period by saying that there were no outstanding concerns with regard to the merchant navy.

Canada's merchant navy veterans have long been fighting for recognition of their valiant effort before, during and after World War II. Merchant seamen were the first into the war and the last out of the war. They took our troops and supplies to Europe during the war and brought them home safely afterward.

The merchant navy served both Canada and its allies during the war. At one point the entire allied war effort had less than a month's supply of food and fuel left. It was the merchant navy, our Canadian merchant navy, that brought the supplies through and avoided what would have been a defeat at the hands of Hitler.

On March 30, 1998 I asked the minister why he would not give merchant navy seamen the status of war veterans and thus grant them the dignity and respect they earned. The minister said that merchant navy veterans were entitled to the same benefits as other veterans. What he failed to mention was that they did not have equal access to the benefits. Without equal access there are not equal benefits. This must change.

Currently our merchant seamen are classified under civilian legislation. This belittles the efforts of these veterans. These veterans sailed the same seas as the navy, faced the same planes as the air force and dodged the same bullets as the army. They are not considered to be war veterans in Canada. In other allied countries they would be entitled to the same benefits and war status as every other war veteran.

● (1815)

Legislation was drafted by a former Reform MP some time ago for the purpose of righting these serious wrongs. There were more delays by the minister. Many merchant navy veterans think the minister is waiting for the issue to die. On average three of these veterans die each week. Their average age is 87 years.

On March 23 representatives of the merchant navy war veterans met with the minister's staff. Here are eight of the requests they made at that meeting, requests they have been making for years.

The first is to recognize the merchant navy as a war service with full status as war veterans under war legislation, not under civilian legislation.

Adjournment Debate

The second is to include the Minister of Transport in the vice regal party at the National War Memorial on behalf of the merchant navy and the 1,500 lives lost in war.

The third is to compensate merchant navy veterans or their surviving spouses for the denial of veterans benefits for over 50 years.

The fourth is to amend the Pension Act to recognize merchant navy veterans who were held as prisoners of war and to compensate them for missed opportunities and benefits offered to other prisoners of war.

The fifth is to return immediately outstanding wages and benefits being held from merchant seamen and their surviving spouses.

The sixth is to compensate merchant navy veterans because they were the only military service that paid income tax during the war.

The seventh is to restore the \$88 million budgeted in 1992 to cover the expenses mentioned and to develop a program to publicize these changes.

The eighth is to allow merchant navy war veterans the same opportunity and access available to other war veterans.

These requests are clear, legitimate and fair. Not once during the March 23 meeting with the minister's office could they provide our veterans with a ray of hope. No commitments were given, no deadlines established, no promises made. Answers were sufficiently ambiguous to warrant a call for clarification and confirmation.

There is simply no time left for these veterans to wait for ambiguities to be cleared up.

Mr. George Proud (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Veterans Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, two points need to be addressed. First, the 1992 legislation provided merchant navy veterans with the same access to all currently available veterans

benefits as armed forces veterans enjoy. As the Minister of Veterans Affairs stated, not a few, not some, but all the benefits.

The hon. member for Edmonton East disputes this. I would ask him to name a current veterans benefit merchant navy veterans do not qualify for and I assure the House that I will show him the specific legal authority under which that benefit is provided to merchant navy veterans today.

The hon. member also suggests that merchant navy veterans have been denied access to benefits because of restrictive wording in the legislation. I invite him to provide the details of any case of a merchant navy veteran being denied a benefit because of such wording. The reality is that not one case has been produced in the almost six years the legislation has been in effect.

My second point is related to the commitment made in 1992 to monitor the implementation of the legislation and to correct any shortcomings which might arise. As mentioned earlier, no material shortcomings have arisen in the six years the legislation has been in force. The legislation has provided the access to veterans benefits it was intended to do.

Nevertheless, merchant navy representatives have identified a number of technical and legal points they would like to see addressed. The Minister of Veterans Affairs is prepared to act on those items. Presumably the minister can count on the full support of the official opposition for the quick passage of that legislation when it is brought forward.

[Translation]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. McClelland): The motion to adjourn the House is now deemed to have been adopted. Accordingly, this House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 10 a.m., pursuant to Standing Order 24.

(The House adjourned at 6.17 p.m)

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Published under the authority of the Speaker of the House of Commons

Publié en conformité de l'autorité du Président de la Chambre des communes

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