



CANADA

# House of Commons Debates

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OFFICIAL REPORT  
(HANSARD)

**Thursday, February 17, 2000**

**Speaker: The Honourable Gilbert Parent**

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# HOUSE OF COMMONS

Thursday, February 17, 2000

The House met at 10 a.m.

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*Prayers*

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## ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

• (1005)

[*Translation*]

### CANADA TRANSPORTATION ACT

**Hon. David M. Collenette (Minister of Transport, Lib.)** moved for leave to introduce Bill C-26, an act to amend the Canada Transportation Act, the Competition Act, the Competition Tribunal Act and the Air Canada Public Participation Act and to amend another act in consequence.

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

\* \* \*

[*English*]

### COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

#### TRANSPORT

**Hon. David M. Collenette (Minister of Transport, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I apologize for being so rusty on the rules, but under the first order of business I neglected to table, in both official languages and pursuant to Standing Order 109, the government's response to the Standing Committee of Transport report on the restructuring of Canada's airline industry, fostering competition and protecting the public interest.

• (1010)

I would seek unanimous consent to allow me to table that response.

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. McClelland):** Does the minister have the unanimous consent of the House to table the response?

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

[*Translation*]

#### LIBRARY OF PARLIAMENT

**Mr. Raymond Lavigne (Verdun—Saint-Henri, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, if the House gives its consent, I move that the first report of the Standing Joint Committee on the Library of Parliament, which was tabled in the House on December 16, 1999, be concurred in.

This report sets out the mandate of the committee, its quorum and its entitlement to sit during sittings of the Senate.

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. McClelland):** Is there unanimous consent for the hon. member to move the motion?

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

**Some hon. members:** No.

\* \* \*

[*English*]

### PETITIONS

#### CHARTER OF RIGHTS AND FREEDOMS

**Mr. Eric Lowther (Calgary Centre, Ref.):** Mr. Speaker, I have a number of petitions to present this morning, and one from petitioners right across the country. There are many hundreds of names.

The petitioners call on parliament to retain in the preamble of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms the reference to the supremacy of God.

#### DANGEROUS OFFENDERS

**Mr. Eric Lowther (Calgary Centre, Ref.):** Mr. Speaker, the second petition has been signed by people all across the country. They are calling for the protection in law of children from pedophiles and sex offenders. They want the law for these situations to be strengthened.

#### TAXATION

**Mr. Eric Lowther (Calgary Centre, Ref.):** The next petition, Mr. Speaker, calls for a relief from the burden of income tax that families have to bear in the country. The petition contains many hundreds of signatures.

I will be tabling all these petitions this morning.

*Supply*

## CRIMINAL CODE

**Mr. Nelson Riis (Kamloops, Thompson and Highland Valleys, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, it is my honour to present a petition, pursuant to Standing Order 36. The petitioners are all from Kamloops.

They are calling on the Government of Canada to amend the criminal code to prevent persons convicted of serious crimes from being released from custody pending the hearing of their appeal, except in exceptional circumstances.

## SENATE

**Mr. Nelson Riis (Kamloops, Thompson and Highland Valleys, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, my second petition is also from the people of Kamloops, who are calling on the Government of Canada to simply abolish the Senate.

## GOODS AND SERVICES TAX

**Mr. Nelson Riis (Kamloops, Thompson and Highland Valleys, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, it is a particular pleasure for me to present this next petition. As you can see by the petition itself, Mr. Speaker, this is not a prop. This is a petition bearing thousands and thousands of names, maybe 20,000 names, of people from Kamloops who are concerned about the GST.

They are suggesting that if we are going to have a tax reduction in the upcoming budget, we should phase out the GST so that everyone benefits from the tax reduction: children, people on low incomes and people with fixed incomes. They feel that every single Canadian would benefit from a reduction in the GST; whereas if we simply reduce the income tax only people who pay income tax will benefit. This is the fairest way to reduce taxes. Thousands of people in the great city of Kamloops are calling on the government to do just that.

## CRIMINAL CODE

**Mr. John Solomon (Regina—Lumsden—Lake Centre, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to present a petition this morning, pursuant to Standing Order 36, on behalf of many constituents as well as people from across Canada, including Kamloops, British Columbia.

These Canadians are concerned that the Criminal Code of Canada makes it too easy for people, who have been convicted of serious crimes, such as murder, attempted murder, sexual assault and manslaughter involving imprisonment greater than five years, to obtain release from custody pending the hearing of their appeal.

The petitioners are asking the House of Commons and the Government of Canada to amend the Criminal Code of Canada to prevent persons convicted of these serious crimes from being released from custody pending the hearing of their appeal except in exceptional circumstances.

I think many Canadians would support this particular petition.

• (1015)

[*Translation*]

## LABELLING OF GENETICALLY ENGINEERED FOODS

**Ms. Hélène Alarie (Louis-Hébert, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise, pursuant to Standing Order 36, to present a petition signed by 1,581 constituents from my riding.

The petitioners call on Parliament to move quickly in order to pass legislation making mandatory the labelling of all foods that are wholly or partially genetically modified.

This is one more in a series of similar petitions signed by thousands in my riding and in the ridings of a number of other members who have presented similar petitions in the House.

[*English*]

## CRIMINAL CODE

**Mr. John O'Reilly (Haliburton—Victoria—Brock, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 36, I am pleased to present a petition from the people of Haliburton, Minden, Tory Hill and Wilberforce.

The petitioners call on parliament to direct the Department of Justice to vigorously defend section 43 of the criminal code and to terminate all funding for this case under the court challenges program. They request parliament to affirm the duty of parents to responsibly raise their children according to their own conscience and beliefs and to retain section 43 of Canada's criminal code as it is currently worded.

\* \* \*

## QUESTIONS ON THE ORDER PAPER

**Mr. Yvon Charbonneau (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Health, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I ask that the remaining questions be allowed to stand.

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. McClelland):** Is that agreed?

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

## GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[*Translation*]

## SUPPLY

## ALLOTTED DAY—LEGISLATIVE COMMITTEE ON BILL C-20

**Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ) moved:**

That this House instruct the Legislative Committee on Bill C-20, An Act to give effect to the requirement for clarity as set out in the opinion of the Supreme Court of Canada in the Quebec Secession Reference, to hold public hearings in all regions of

Quebec and Canada so as to hear as many witnesses having an interest in the Bill as possible, that the hearings be broadcast and that the Committee be given sufficient resources to hold such hearings, all in accordance with the rules and practices of the House.

**Mr. Stéphane Bergeron:** I rise on a point of order, Mr. Speaker. I simply want to draw to your attention and to the attention of the members of this House that the Bloc Québécois leader will be sharing his time with the hon. member for Beauharnois—Salaberry and that all the Bloc Québécois members who will rise afterwards will also be sharing their time.

**Mr. Gilles Duceppe:** Mr. Speaker, we are moving this motion today, the day after the committee began its proceedings on Bill C-20. As we know, this bill deals essentially with two things: the alleged clarity of the question and the percentage or majority required.

Overall, this is a bill that seeks to deny the rights of the National Assembly, which has held referendums under its own rules in the past. I am referring to the two referendums on sovereignty, in 1980 and 1995, and to the referendum on the Charlottetown accord, in 1992, when a Liberal government was in office in Quebec. The federal government is now questioning these eminently democratic exercises.

As for the issue of clarity, it is somewhat surprising to think that the members of the House of Commons, 75 of whom come from Quebec and 226 from the other provinces, are better able than the members of the National Assembly to determine the clarity of a question.

• (1020)

Moreover, we know that two thirds of the members from Quebec, representing the people of Quebec and democratically mandated to do so, oppose this bill. Those who think they speak on behalf of the Quebecers should look at those who represent them in this place and note that they represent only a third of the Quebec delegation in the House of Commons.

One wonders how people from Moose Jaw, Regina, Halifax, Vancouver or Toronto would be in a better position to determine the clarity of a question than people from Chicoutimi, Tadoussac, Laval, Quebec City, Montreal, Trois-Rivières or Hull. This sort of thing is rather insulting.

What makes no sense is the fact that the government claims these people would be more able to determine what makes the question clear, but refuses to let the committee consult these people across Quebec and Canada to see whether the bill is clear. There is more than an apparent contradiction here. There is a real one.

Why do they want to consult everyone in Canada when Quebecers have to decide their future, but refuse to let the people of Canada and Quebec be consulted when the time comes for the House to pass this bill?

### *Supply*

On the subject of clarity, let us look at the latest referendum. On the eve of the referendum, I heard the Prime Minister say in a speech to the people, as he looked them in the eye with the camera focussed on him so that everyone could see his alleged sincerity “The question is clear: if you say yes, you leave; if you say no, you stay”. I was not the one saying that, it was the Prime Minister of Canada.

That evening, I said to myself that it was really clear, that if the Prime Minister understood, if the member for Saint-Maurice understood, a lot of people understood.

I find that rather contemptuous of the 94% of Quebecers who took part in this very democratic process. That day, apparently 94% of the people went to vote without having any idea what they were doing. That is extraordinary. Those who voted no apparently understood, and those who voted yes, apparently did not know what they were doing.

And what about all those Canadians who flocked to Montreal to take part in a love-in, thanks to Canadian Airlines’ generosity—a \$100 fare from Vancouver to Montreal, but not the other way around? Was the question not clear when all these folks came to Montreal to tell us that they loved us? Was the question not clear when they all rushed panic-stricken to implore us not to leave?

I have to wonder about the reasoning. Did these people come for nothing, or was it perhaps that what was not clear was how much they actually loved us. Now that is something else again.

**An hon. member:** Yes.

**Some hon. members:** Hear, hear.

**Mr. Gilles Duceppe:** Finally, I looked at the question asked in a referendum held under the auspices of the federal government in the Lac-Saint-Jean region, for the Montagnais, I believe.

There are two questions, but only one possible answer. It is not possible to answer yes to the first and no to the second. There are two questions, but it is yes or no to both; it is not possible to answer yes to the one and no to the other, or vice versa. There are three paragraphs, some 250 words referring to a few pieces of legislation, to some regulations about an agreement that is not included.

The federal government talks to us about clarity. In this referendum, and I am thinking of the other point about this bill, there is a 50% plus one rule. In this referendum, they will accept 50% plus one of the votes, a clear majority, an absolute majority, as they say in the book.

That is exactly what we are saying. You know what an absolute majority is, Mr. Speaker. It is more than half of the votes, 50% plus one. That is what a majority is.

*Supply*

A majority was good enough in the Lac-Saint-Jean referendum for the Montagnais. A majority was good enough for Newfoundland in 1948. What was good enough for Newfoundlanders or the Montagnais is not good enough for Quebecers?

Yesterday, I listened to the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs. He should realize that his bill accords more importance to a federalist vote than a sovereigntist one. The vote of the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs would carry more weight than mine. Is not everyone equal before the law? Yesterday, when I heard him get upset and talk to my colleague from Beauharnois—Salaberry in a familiar tone, saying “How can one assume there would not be any negotiations?”

• (1025)

With the contempt he showed yesterday, talking to a colleague with such familiarity, the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs reminded me of Pierre Elliott Trudeau, when he was the Minister of Justice here in Ottawa. At the time, he addressed the then Quebec Premier, Daniel Johnson senior as “the member from Bagot”. Daniel Johnson replied by calling him “the member from Mount Royal”. That is what it was, the same kind of slightly contemptuous attitude that the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs displayed yesterday.

He said that we could not take for granted that he would not negotiate. But what are we to expect from someone who talks about clarity but is unable to set a threshold, which could be different from 50% plus one in his view? He wants clarity, but he says “Listen, let us first have a referendum, and then, in my greatness, I will tell you whether the result is acceptable or not”. It is rather disturbing for his students. I wonder if, as a professor, he used to tell his students “Write the exam first, I will decide if you made the grade later. I will let you know whether the passing mark was 60%, 75% or 80% and will determine if my question was clear enough”.

This is what he told us and is telling us. He talks about clarity, but it was quite extraordinary to see the attitude he displayed yesterday. Of course we have to assume that he does not want to negotiate when we know that he will not even tell us what the required percentage is. How can we trust anyone who acts as judge and jury? This is what the minister is doing, acting as judge and jury.

He used some arguments, when answering a question from my colleague and critic for the Conservative Party, the hon. member for Richmond—Arthabasca, who was asking “The Bloc members, are they not afraid of losing their pension?” Why, as members, would we not be entitled to our pension if they are? He need not worry, when the federal members’ pensions is the only thing left to negotiate, we already know who we will choose as our two negotiators: the Prime Minister of Canada and André Ouellet. They have a major interest in negotiating theirs. I can assure you of that, Mr. Speaker, and I trust them in terms of negotiating their pensions.

I think the minister is currently moving in circles where others have moved in the past. It is very easy, as a Quebecer, to become a very popular minister in English Canada, as he is currently. As for the two solitudes, he personifies both of them, and could be called a hero in English Canada in Quebec. He certainly does not represent the people of Quebec. Now this is easy, it is what is expected from Quebec politicians; they are very popular in English Canada when they are used to stifle Quebecers. This is what he is doing and it is shameful.

For all these reasons, it seems to me that it would be normal—and my colleague will get more specific—to let the committee travel in every region in Canada and Quebec to meet people. All the other opposition parties agree with that. We differ on the bill’s content, but certainly not on the need to consult Canadians and Quebecers in order to bring some clarity in this confused legislation.

**Mr. Jean-Paul Marchand (Québec East, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, I thank my leader for speaking out on this issue of the utmost importance for Quebec.

I would like to ask him a question regarding the fact that there are Liberal members from Quebec who are taking part in this attack on Quebec.

• (1030)

I would like to know what he thinks of members who were elected for the Liberal Party in Quebec and who support Bill C-20.

**Mr. Gilles Duceppe:** Mr. Speaker, first of all, they have the right to have an opinion that is different from ours, but they should have the courage of their convictions and come to Quebec to explain their position. That is what I think.

Some of them are here today. It would be interesting if they took part in this debate and asked questions, but it would appear that they are not going to do so.

I remember the patriation of the Constitution in 1982. Out of the 75 federalist members representing Quebec, at that time, only two expressed their opposition, namely Roch LaSalle, a Conservative, and Mr. Ducloux, a Liberal, who had the courage of his convictions and told his party “No. I refuse to play the role English Canada is asking me to play in Ottawa. I represent Quebecers. I am not a pawn to be used by those who want to impose their will upon us”. We remember that the federal Liberals had the lesson of their life in the following election. Since then, they are a minority in Quebec. They paid for what they did.

I hope that, in the next election, voters in Canada will realize that the time has come to have people other than Liberals to represent them in Ottawa. I agree with the Minister of Intergovernmental

*Supply*

Affairs and the Prime Minister when they tell us that they will not negotiate after a yes victory in Quebec. They are right, because Canadians will send other people to negotiate on their behalf. The work of Liberals will be finished. They will have failed.

**Mr. Yvan Loubier (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, I thank our leader, the hon. member for Laurier—Sainte-Marie, for this fine sortie against Bill C-20.

I would like to know his impressions on one specific issue. If, in 1995, during the referendum debate in Quebec, the National Assembly had passed such a bill against the federalist vote, limiting it so that it would have less weight than the sovereigntist vote, what would people have thought of the National Assembly and of its Parti Québécois members?

**Mr. Gilles Duceppe:** Mr. Speaker, we did not, and would not, do such a thing, because of our respect for democracy. For us it is a matter of one person, one vote. Everyone is equal in the eyes of the law.

It would have been most extraordinary, if we had said “Votes in sovereigntist ridings hold more weight than those in federalist ridings. Let us weight them differently, arrange things so that it passes, and then we will let people know the outcome. Vote first and then we will tell you the outcome. We will concoct one”. That is what they are telling us.

This makes no sense. The same goes for clarity. If the question had been “Do you want Quebec to become a sovereign country?” and then the whole debate had centred on partnership, they would have said “Aha, there was a trick in it. You referred to a partnership. You did not dare put it in the question”. Damned if you do, and damned if you don’t, as they say. We are used to that here.

Quebecers have wakened up. Let Canadians do the same, and open their eyes to the fact that the Liberals are misinforming them about Quebec. Let them send their own representatives to talk to Quebecers, equal to equal. Let them respect the fact that Quebecers are a people, just as they are. We are neither superior nor inferior. For once in this whole business, we want to speak together on an equal footing, with the same status, not inferior and not superior.

We will never be the first country in the world. There is no such thing. This is a ridiculous illusion.

We want to have our country, like the Canadians have theirs. Perhaps then we will be able to get along as friends, which we have trouble doing while under the same roof.

**Mr. Daniel Turp (Beauharnois—Salaberry, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, I also rise on behalf of the Bloc Québécois to support this motion I will move an amendment to, at the end of my remarks, and to explain that Bloc Québécois members really want Quebecers and other Canadians to have the opportunity to be heard on Bill C-20.

• (1035)

We have made this request repeatedly in the House. It has always been refused by the Prime Minister, the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs and the Leader of the Government in the House.

We tried again in the committee Bill C-20 was referred to. The Liberal majority rejected this proposal, which was supported by the three other opposition parties.

For the last time in this House, we would like to try to convince the government members that Canadians should be given the opportunity to air their views on this bill, whether they agree or disagree, in a place where it will be easier for them to do so, that is in their own town or city, in the town hall or community centre where they usually take an active part in the democratic process.

My remarks will deal with the undermining of democracy by Bill C-20, but also by the process by which the government wants to have it passed.

The architect of this bill, the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, does not like it when we tell him about the undemocratic nature of his bill. Nor does he like it when we talk about the extremely undemocratic nature of the process, which is under way, whereby this bill will be considered and passed by the House of Commons.

I want to talk about the undemocratic nature of this. I am not shy to talk about it, and I believe a great majority of Quebecers share this view. In this respect, we, of the Bloc Québécois, are very representative of what Quebecers think both about this bill and about the process by which the House wants to have it passed.

When we think of it, this bill is undemocratic because the democracy it is creating will disallow what the national assembly and the Quebec people decide. This is also democracy that gags the work of the House and the work of the committee considering Bill C-20. Let me explain.

This is a democracy of disallowance, a sick democracy because it wants to disallow the national assembly, to disallow a national assembly that always had the privilege and the authority to adopt a question, to decide what Quebecers would be consulted on, to frame a question which was debated by the national assembly for 35 hours, which was debated by majority and opposition parties, sovereigntist and federalist parties, and which was finally adopted by the assembly, the seat of the sovereignty of the Quebec people, who must continue to freely decide its own future.

Bill C-20 would allow the House of Commons to disallow a question adopted by the national assembly. Despite all the rhetoric about the respect of the national assembly’s right to determine the content and wording of the question, this bill confirms the right of

*Supply*

the House of Commons to determine that a question adopted by the national assembly is not clear.

The House of Commons tells and, in a way, orders the national assembly not to ask a question dealing with a mandate to negotiate, or referring to an economic and political partnership that Quebec would generously offer Canada.

Such a democracy is a democracy that disallows the jurisdiction and prerogative of Quebec, its national assembly and its people when it comes to deciding its future and how to shape that future.

• (1040)

While a breach of the national assembly's prerogatives is very serious, a breach of the Quebec people's sovereignty is even more serious because under this bill the federal government could challenge a majority vote by which the Quebec people would have decided to have its own country.

Indeed, Bill C-20 is totally confusing in that respect, the very opposite of the principle of clarity it proclaims. For instance, clause 2(2) sets out a number of criteria that give no clear indication of what would constitute a real majority.

This democracy disallows the people of Quebec and the choice it would make in a referendum. As the Premier of Quebec said a few days ago, such a bill shows the will of the government to give this House a true power of disallowance and reservation regarding resolutions passed by the national assembly and decisions made by the Quebec people.

This is unacceptable, it is undemocratic and we will repeat it both in this House and in committee. We will have no reservation denouncing Bill C-20 as an undemocratic measure.

This democracy is also characterized by closure. The Leader of the Government in the House will not like to hear us say that, seeing as he introduced time allocation motions to end to the debate on the bill before the House after only a few hours of debate at second reading, when only seven members from the Bloc Quebecois had the opportunity to speak.

That gag order introduced by the government House leader is unacceptable and all opposition parties condemned it at the time of the vote. A democracy that gags debate on such an important bill for the future of Quebec people and in fact all Quebecers and other Canadians is a very troubled democracy indeed.

We can see the same kind of closure attitude and democracy in the committee that was set up to study the bill. At its very first sitting, members were informed that only 45 witnesses would be heard. Quotas were imposed on the parties. Each party is allowed to call in a certain number of witnesses: 15 for the Liberal Party, 12 for the Reform Party, 10 for the Bloc Quebecois and 4 for the Progressive Conservative Party and the NDP. We were even

refused the right to inform the citizens of Canada and Quebec that hearings were being held and that the committee was prepared to hear their views and receive their briefs.

The work of the committee was gagged today, we know that the government is determined to move extremely quickly and to steamroller the opposition even though it represents 62% of Canadians in this House. The Bloc Quebecois represents a lot more Quebecers than the majority government party.

On behalf of my party, I want to move an amendment to the motion. I move:

That the motion be amended in the French version by adding after the word "nombre" the following:

"possible"

To conclude, I will cite the August 1998 opinion of the Supreme Court of Canada. In reference to democracy, the supreme court said:

No one has a monopoly on truth, and our system is predicated on the faith that in the marketplace of ideas, the best solutions to public problems will rise to the top. Inevitably, there will be dissenting voices. A democratic system of government is committed to considering those dissenting voices, and seeking to acknowledge and address those voices in the laws by which all in the community must live.

• (1045)

There are many dissenting voices concerning this bill. There is a clear majority of dissenting voices. The government should listen to these dissenting voices and withdraw Bill C-20.

[English]

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. McClelland):** The amendment is in order.

[Translation]

**Mrs. Pauline Picard (Drummond, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, I would like to congratulate my colleague from Beauharnois—Salaberry for his speech and thank him for enlightening us on the underhanded dealings by the government in its efforts to deny the basic rights of the people of Quebec.

Subclause 3(2) of Bill C-20 contains an unacceptable threat to territorial integrity and a threat whose intent is to limit the right of the people of Quebec to freely choose its status and its political future.

I would like to ask my colleague from Beauharnois—Salaberry: in Quebec whose task it is to set the terms of its authority over all parts of its territory?

**Mr. Daniel Turp:** Mr. Speaker, when we realize that the bill talks of borders in the clause my colleague has cited, we truly understand that the issue of borders is raised not to enlighten Quebecers on what will happen, but to frighten them, to intimate that the territory of Quebec may likely or possibly be partitioned.

*Supply*

Although the minister has said—and he repeated it yesterday—that it is perhaps a matter of border correction as was the case in Slovakia or in other countries that achieved sovereignty, I am pleased to note that bill 99, currently being debated in the Quebec National Assembly, reaffirms the Quebec consensus on this matter, which involves all provincial political parties, be they the Parti Québécois, the Quebec Liberal Party or the Action démocratique.

This bill reaffirms that Quebec's territorial integrity must be preserved and that all the political party leaders are unanimous in saying that, in the event of separation, Quebec must keep its borders.

I think that this is a healthy thing. In most, all—I should say—of the recent cases of declaration of independence, even those involving minorities or native populations, the new republics of the USSR, Yugoslavia or Slovakia, for example, kept their borders. This makes good common sense.

**Mrs. Christiane Gagnon (Québec, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for covering all aspects of this bill, which flouts democracy in Quebec and in Canada. It is a disgraceful con job.

• (1050)

The member for Beauharnois—Salaberry also explained that there is another piece of trickery going on and that is the choice of date. We must remember the strategy used shortly before Christmas, and the impact this choice of date had on democracy.

The public was not consulted. They mention 45 groups. They seem to want to flaunt the fact that 45 groups will be appearing before the committee. They think that 45 groups will do, but there is also a need for the public to be made aware of the impact of this bill.

**Mr. Daniel Turp:** Mr. Speaker, my colleague is giving me an opportunity to inform the House, if it is not already aware, that it is very difficult to interest witnesses in appearing before the committee on such short notice. Since it began its work, the committee has had great difficulty getting witnesses to appear.

There were supposed to be witnesses yesterday evening, and none appeared. Some were scheduled for 9.30 this morning, but the first were heard at 10.15 a.m. We have no agenda for this afternoon because no witnesses could be recruited. I do not know what is on the agenda for tomorrow or next week.

The haste with which the government wishes to proceed is an affront to Canadian democracy, which usually permits parliamentary committees to give citizens notice and invite them to appear and present briefs, which in many other instances has allowed committees to travel abroad, in Quebec and Canada to hear from witnesses.

The prognosis for democracy in Quebec and in Canada is not good. That is why we want this bill withdrawn.

Should Bill C-20 be passed anyway, it will not have any legitimacy because 60% and maybe more of federal members from Quebec will have voted against it.

**Hon. Don Boudria (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to take part in today's debate, even though, basically, it is sad to have such a debate.

It is sad because the Bloc Québécois moved this motion for a somewhat artificial purpose, under the pretence of a procedural debate. However, as we just heard, on the substantive issue, they of course want to start the debate on Bill C-20 all over again, a debate they did not really participate in because they wasted the time of the House by wanting to table press clippings and old newspaper articles, and by resorting to other similar tactics.

Today's motion from the Bloc Québécois reads as follows:

That this House instruct the Legislative Committee on Bill C-20, An Act to give effect to the requirement for clarity as set out in the opinion of the Supreme Court of Canada in the Quebec Secession Reference, to hold public hearings in all the regions of Quebec and Canada—

Presumably, this means of Quebec and of the rest of Canada, but this is how the motion is worded.

—so as to hear as many witnesses having an interest in the Bill as possible.

The government is opposed to this motion which would instruct the legislative committee on the bill to hold public hearings outside Ottawa. Why? First, because the goal of the Bloc Québécois is not to make the committee travel to hear more witnesses. Its objective is to cause unreasonable delays. We already have plenty of evidence to that effect.

Bloc Québécois members tried to table in this House close to 300 press clippings, 300 articles from old newspapers. They preferred to do that instead of hearing themselves talk. One must conclude that what they had to say was not very important since, instead of making speeches, they resorted to such manoeuvres in a futile attempt to attract the attention of the media and of Canadians.

• (1055)

Second, one cannot say that the parliamentary committee is not doing its work properly. To start with, the members sitting on this committee are doing excellent work. They are all members who take this whole debate to heart.

Moreover, the witnesses appearing before the committee are of great quality. Of course, there are those who choose not to invite witnesses they want to be able to say that these witnesses could not

*Supply*

be heard. For example, the committee is hearing today from Mr. Lebel and Mr. Castonguay. They are not just anybody. I am not saying that I will agree with all the witnesses who will appear before this parliamentary committee, but there are people who have something to say, important things to say, presumably, and who will appear before the committee.

I might add that the committee hearings will be televised and that all Canadians will be able to watch them.

[English]

All hon. members are aware of the real agenda behind this motion. It is not to enable more Canadians to testify before the legislative committee. Bloc members have admitted that they are not even using all the time slots available to them now to produce witnesses, so how can they claim that they need even more? It is not to hear from witnesses.

[Translation]

Finally, I have to mention something important. I heard some members of the Bloc say a few days ago that certain witnesses will not be able to appear before the committee in Ottawa. However, these very same witnesses, at least several of them, and many others came in Ottawa a week ago to insist on being heard by the parliamentary committee. Now they claim that they cannot come to Ottawa to be heard by the committee. It is absurd. It is still the same distance to come to Ottawa as it was last week. How can we take them seriously when they are saying that it will be impossible for these witnesses to be heard?

[English]

No, the real agenda is to do anything but have an open democratic review of this bill. The real agenda is to stall Bill C-20. We have proof of that. Anyone who has watched the House of Commons over recent months will know. When members of parliament try at least 300 times to waste the time of the House by tabling old newspaper clippings instead of making speeches, it is quite obvious what is going on. The agenda is to kill the bill.

[Translation]

I pointed out to the House leader of the Bloc Québécois that the way the legislative committee conducts its business depends, first, on the committee's recommendation and, second, on the House's decision. As I noted, regarding the selection of witnesses, Standing Order 113 says that the committee is empowered to examine the bill and to hear as witnesses people who have a technical expertise to offer.

The government wanted to be as flexible as possible by offering members of this House the opportunity to use a definition of these witnesses on technical matters that is broad enough to allow the people to participate fully in this process, as long as some members of this House do not, of course, use this as an excuse to slow down the work of the parliamentary committee.

I also noted that, because Bill C-20 affects all men and women in Canada, whether they live in Quebec or elsewhere, its proceedings should be televised so that all those who wish to do so, since 80% or 90% of Canadians who have access to cable services, can watch the witnesses appearing before this parliamentary committee.

• (1100)

[English]

I also responded to a letter from the leader of the Conservative Party who claimed that he wanted to propose a reasoned amendment to improve the bill. One does not need to be a student of parliamentary procedure for too long to know that a reasoned amendment does not amend the bill. A reasoned amendment amends the motion of the bill. It can only do one thing, kill the bill. This is from time immemorial. It is in all of our procedural documents. The bill would disappear after a reasoned amendment was carried which is what the leader of the Conservatives offered. The bill would disappear from the order paper. That is on page 640 of our procedural manual.

[Translation]

Nor does the government intend to do what the Conservative Party leader asked for.

The legislative committee agreed to hear witnesses from all over Canada, witnesses such as the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs who yesterday made an excellent presentation before the parliamentary committee. Almost all Canadians, whether they live in Quebec or elsewhere, will be able to watch that presentation and many others on television. The media can also air excerpts in their news reports.

**An hon. member:** That's something new.

**Hon. Don Boudria:** The hon. member across the way says it is new. It is not something completely new, but it is nevertheless an exception for a parliamentary committee—

**An hon. member:** An exception?

**Hon. Don Boudria:** If the hon. member wants to hear the answer, he should listen. If a committee is televised, it is an exception, nevertheless, something that happens by order of the committee chairs in collaboration with the whips.

**An hon. member:** Several committees are televised.

**Hon. Don Boudria:** This does not happen with more than one committee at a time. Anyone who comes to parliament regularly knows how things work in parliament. In general, there can be only one parliamentary committee at a time with access to the room prepared for televising.

This matter has been in the public domain since the supreme court's opinion on the reference, in August 1998. The hon. members over the way cannot, therefore, claim that this is something new, something about which the Canadian public knew nothing. It will be remembered that even the premier of Quebec congratulated the supreme court at the time. He said he was delighted with the court's decision.

Let us remind ourselves of what the supreme court said in this decision. It said that it was up to the political actors, to the elected representatives, to determine what constituted a clear majority in the case of a referendum. The court chose to add the word clear, a question that should be clear or unambiguous. These then were the two criteria established since 1998.

When certain members claim, as one just has, that the contents of the bill introduced in the House on December 13 last were unknown until then, they are not acting very seriously. The supreme court opinion had been known of since 1998, so there was nothing new about it.

Furthermore, they are not acting very seriously either in claiming simultaneously that this bill was introduced on December 13 and that the House is pushing it through too quickly on February 17 of the following year. The members across the way are not acting very seriously, and they are well aware of this.

• (1105)

Members will remember that other bills have been passed in this House and elsewhere a lot faster.

I would like to remind the House why this government believes that we should pass Bill C-20. It is a vital issue for our country. The Government of Canada must play an important role to follow up on the requirement for clarity as set out by the Supreme Court of Canada in its opinion dated August 20, 1998.

It is our duty and our obligation to say which factors will be considered when the time comes to decide if we must negotiate the separation of one province from Canada. Obviously, like most Canadians and Quebecers, I hope this will never happen.

The Bloc members accuse us of having no respect for the National Assembly of Quebec and the population of Quebec. Since when is it undemocratic to ask for clarity? The members opposite say that they respect democracy. Yet they refuse to accept the result of two democratic referendums. They say "Till next time. See you soon" or something to that effect.

The members opposite say "It is not a problem if the public does not share our views. We do not have to respect democracy when the answer is not the one we want. When it is the one we wish for, it is a different matter". And they claim to be great democrats.

### *Supply*

We are not the ones who launched this debate. It is not the Government of Canada. It is not the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs nor the Prime Minister of Canada nor the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons. It is not the Government of Canada who is seeking to destroy the country.

However, we said that we would discuss the matter and give the House a role in the decision to undertake negotiations on the secession of a province in the unlikely event—an event I hope will never happen—that a province wanted to leave this beautiful country, which the United Nations has been determined is the best in the world.

We would like very much to put aside the debate concerning another referendum on secession, but the separatist leaders in Quebec refuse to do so.

**An hon. member:** We have to talk about the Americans, the French and the Germans.

**Hon. Don Boudria:** I just heard a member on the other side talking about the United States, France and other countries. It is rather interesting, because the United States of America and France are both indivisible countries. And yet, the members opposite say that "other countries are indivisible, but Canada can be divided", even if people say that Canada must stay together and have said so twice in Quebec. But they do not care about that.

Is the Bloc afraid of asking Quebecers whether or not they wish to separate from the rest of Canada and become an independent country? Yes, of course. The member opposite just said so.

**An hon. member:** We are not afraid.

**Hon. Don Boudria:** The members opposite have proven that they are afraid to ask a clear question and to obtain a clear answer. That is why we have always had ambiguous questions in the past. They were questions 70 and 120 words long to ask Quebecers "Do you want to separate, yes or no?"

**An hon. member:** In my riding, 94% of the voters said yes and you claim that they did not understand? This is really incredible.

**Hon. Don Boudria:** I see that some members opposite are reacting. They are free to do so.

A province's separation is too serious and too irreversible for our government to undertake negotiations leading to secession without its being sure that this is what the people really want.

The Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs spoke of this in his December 13 speech. The more serious the decision, the more it must have the unanimous support of society. This has been a principle of democracy from day one. It is so strongly entrenched

*Supply*

that even people's organizations say that it takes a two thirds majority to change their bylaws.

• (1110)

The Prime Minister has spoken of this. He even referred to groups such as hunting and fishing clubs, unions or other organizations, which require substantial majorities before their bylaws can be amended.

**An hon. member:** The Montagnais too.

**Hon. Don Boudria:** However, the people opposite are trying to tell us that the people of Quebec were able to say no to their proposal twice, even if the question was totally ambiguous, even if the members opposite tried to confuse the people. With a yes vote, they could break up the country, even though the supreme court has said this is not the way to go about it. This is what the members opposite claim.

No, this is not the way to break up a country. Naturally, in any case, the people of Canada, whether they live in Quebec or elsewhere, do not want to break up this country. Canadians want to keep it whole.

I was born in Quebec and am a Franco-Ontarian by adoption. I too want this country to remain whole—

**An hon. member:** Oh, oh.

**Hon. Don Boudria:** Yes, I hear the comments by the members opposite. I heard them again, as I have often heard them in the past, on the subject of francophones outside Quebec. This happens often—

**An hon. member:** Your language, your culture.

**Hon. Don Boudria:** —among the Bloc Quebecois element, contempt for francophones outside Quebec—

**An hon. member:** That is false.

**Hon. Don Boudria:** —is often heard. We heard it again a few minutes ago in this House. I do not like that.

I am used to it a bit, but we know the source of it. It always comes from the same source naturally. The people opposite will not manage to break up the country. Neither will they kill off francophones outside Quebec with the disdain

**Mr. Maurice Dumas:** That is wrong.

**Hon. Don Boudria:** —they so often display, even today.

The clarity bill sets out the circumstances in which this House would say that the government of Canada would be required to undertake the negotiation of the separation of a province from Canada.

Of course, we all want the country to remain united and strong as it is now. The bill is reasonable. The government has imposed a reasonable approach. Day after day, we have witnessed the delaying tactics used to hold up the bill. Then, we moved it on to the next stage. We let it go onto the Order Paper about two months ahead of proceeding to the next stage, again in order to let the people take part in the process.

I would like to take this opportunity to remind the leader of the Bloc that, in 1997, when we were considering the non-denominational schools amendment, he said that the creation of a parliamentary committee not a travelling committee because the Bloc refused to hear about that was a stalling antidemocratic tactic and an affront to the democratic process. This held up the bill for five days.

There is nothing time wasting or antidemocratic about the process being followed by this government. On the contrary, we want the public to be involved; we want parliamentarians to be involved. This is why we used a reasonable approach under the very capable leadership of the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs.

**Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, I am happy because we will get to the bottom of some things.

First of all, as far as linguistic school boards are concerned, let me remind the government House leader that there was unanimity at the Quebec national assembly. Through its national assembly, Quebec had the power to determine the structure of its schools because, as far as I know, education is a provincial jurisdiction.

Ottawa wanted to teach us a lesson and said “No, no; maybe they do not understand properly in Quebec. We are going to show them how things are done”.

• (1115)

For those people across the way, a consensus is not enough; the unanimous consent of the national assembly is not sufficient. This time, things are very different because the Quebec government is opposed to the measure. That is why the situation is not the same. Let us compare what is comparable.

Second, some people say we look down on Francophones living outside Quebec. I have heard that very often. It is absolutely false. Maybe we have talked about the Reform Party, but we have also talked on several occasions about the sovereigntists.

Francophones outside Quebec have rights simply because they exist and not because Quebec is part of the federation. They will never serve as hostages in negotiations with Quebec. English Quebecers have rights in Quebec, not because Quebec is part of the Canadian federation, but because they do have rights and these rights will be respected.

I submit to the hon. member that he should fight in the other provinces so that francophones outside Quebec enjoy the same rights as anglophones in Quebec. He should support the Montfort battle instead of making false accusations here.

Third, as regards unions, the member's former colleague was the president of a central labour body in Quebec. I was with the CSN, where a change to the constitution required a vote of 50% plus one.

If a union wants to leave a central labour body, there is a so-called period of union raiding. The hon. member is not familiar with the Quebec legislation, but his colleagues from Quebec should be. Every two or three years, a union can leave and join another central labour body. The ultimate way to effect a change is when the Department of Labour, which is more or less the supreme court of labour relations, imposes a vote in which the absolute majority applies, that is the 50% plus one rule. The hon. member knows that.

**An hon. member:** Let us talk about the vote.

**Mr. Gilles Duceppe:** I am not talking about the vote. Obviously the CEQ did not engage much in raiding activities, because it is involved in the education sector. But when a vote is taken at the labour department, the 50% plus one rule applies.

**Mr. Yvan Loubier:** He does not even know what was going on at the CEQ. He was totally out of it.

**Mr. Gilles Duceppe:** The hon. member is talking about the signature of cards. A distinction must be made.

The hon. member was not involved in the organization at the grassroots level, he was president. I worked at the grassroots level. When we sign the cards, it is 50% plus one. But when things are not clear, the department wants clarity, and it is 50% plus one of the persons participating.

**Hon. Don Boudria:** Mr. Speaker, first, the member refers to the constitutional amendment on school boards, claiming it enjoyed unanimous support among the people. Of course, I do not know too many issues enjoying unanimous support, which was certainly not the case for this amendment, even though it was a good one.

Second, the member claims that parliamentary unanimity means that the Constitution may be circumvented. He says, for instance, that such a constitutional amendment does not need, or hardly needs, the agreement of the Parliament of Canada. He knows full well that a constitutional amendment must be ratified by a resolution of the proper legislative assembly, in this case the National Assembly of Quebec, and of course by both Houses of the Parliament of Canada.

Because a constitutional amendment only concerns one province in particular does not mean that it should not be ratified by the Parliament of Canada. It had to be done, and it was done with the

### *Supply*

support of members across the way. It was necessary, therefore. At the time, even ministers from Quebec came and testified before the committee. Mrs. Marois was one of them.

I have dealt with that point and would like now to deal with the issue of francophones outside Quebec since it has just been raised by the leader of the Bloc Québécois, who said that francophones—

**An hon. member:** Assimilated.

**Hon. Don Boudria:** I am being accused of being assimilated. This is the theme raised a while ago and one the Bloc leader has just renounced. We, the francophones outside Quebec, the Acadians, the Ontarians and all the other, have been called all kinds of names, but we are used to it. We do not like it, but we are used to it. We know those people.

**An hon. member:** Turncoat.

**Hon. Don Boudria:** According to the Bloc members across the way, francophones outside Quebec are turncoats.

• (1120)

My point is this. For members opposite to suggest that somehow Quebec is not the motherland of French speaking Canadians throughout Canada is to negate their very existence.

I am an Ontarian, and I recognize the importance of Quebecers and of the French culture in my country. How could I do otherwise? How can members opposite tell me Quebecers' culture has no significance for francophones outside Quebec? It is nonsense, because we do know the importance of Quebecers for us and for our own survival. I never would have thought that Bloc members would suggest the opposite.

[*English*]

**Mr. Jay Hill (Prince George—Peace River, Ref.):** Mr. Speaker, I listened with great interest to the hon. House leader of the government on this very important issue.

I want to begin my very brief comments by saying that the Reform Party, as the official opposition, supports the bill. We support this initiative by the government, but we do not support fast tracking it. We see no need for that.

Very seldom do we see a situation where all four opposition parties agree. In this case, at the special legislative committee formed to study Bill C-20, when meeting to discuss setting the agenda for the committee, all four opposition parties agreed that the committee should travel to seek the widest possible input from Canadians on this issue of importance. I find it ironic that the Prime Minister, before Christmas, touted Bill C-20 as an extremely important bill for Canada, for the national unity of our country, and yet the Liberal members on the committee said "It is not all that

*Supply*

important. There are only three clauses. It is no big deal. We do not need to have much input from Canadians. We will hold committee hearings here over the next week or week and a half and we will ram it through. No problem”.

I ask the hon. government House leader to address this concern of all Canadians. Why, when all opposition parties say the committee should be allowed to travel, in particular to Quebec, is the government refusing?

**Hon. Don Boudria:** Mr. Speaker, first, let us remember what happened. The bill was tabled in the House on December 13. We all know that the bill was put in the public domain at that time. The supreme court reference was on August 20, 1998. Things are not being discovered five minutes prior here. This is something that is progressing and it is an issue which has been in the public domain for a long time.

When we tried to introduce the bill last fall, the House was greeted with all kinds of dilatory motions to stop the bill from proceeding. Newspaper clippings were tabled and hours and hours of House time were wasted. It is not the government which acted in an unreasonable way.

Finally, the bill was tabled. The Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs made an excellent speech in the House at the beginning of the debate. The very first item of business for the House to consider when we returned in February was this bill. It has a very high priority. It is an important issue.

That does not mean the bill is very long. That is a different proposition. It does not have hundreds of pages and thousands of clauses. It is not a bill which is very lengthy to study or read, but it is important. Those are two different concepts which some people seem to confuse when it suits them.

We have had several hours of debate. We have had stalling and more stalling in the House. Then we put the motion for time allocation.

**Mr. Jean-Paul Marchand:** Talk about closure.

• (1125)

**Hon. Don Boudria:** We did not propose to do the bill under closure, with three readings in one day. We had one reading and then we sent it to committee. We are listening to a maximum of 45 witnesses. That is a very, very large number, as witnesses go. We will have several days of listening to witnesses. The government is behaving in a very reasonable way. Then of course we will have report stage and, finally, third reading.

**Mr. Grant Hill (MacLeod, Ref.):** Mr. Speaker, this is my opportunity to express, once again, the official opposition's support in principle for the so-called clarity bill.

I want to address the big issues which the official opposition wanted to address with this bill. First, we felt that it could be improved in terms of its clarity. The journalists in this country have named it the so-called clarity bill for good reason. There are some areas that could be improved.

Second, we felt that the idea that this could be established by a few people in a room somewhere is old-fashioned politics. We wanted to have the broadest consultation possible. This was a strategic decision that we made.

We also felt that some of the issues that were being put forth in the bill—and there are four of them—could be expanded. We wanted to make sure that all the issues were addressed; the major, important issues.

Finally—and this is the area that I think the bill completely misses—we wanted to put forward things that could improve this federation, to stop the eternal and infernal battle that the bill addresses.

I listened carefully to the House leader say that he felt it was reasonable to move time allocation at second reading and to shorten the committee process because the Bloc was doing things to slow down the whole process of parliament. That is legitimate. My colleagues in the Bloc have done everything they can to slow down the work of the House. However, I know that the government never approached the Bloc to say “If you stop this we will allow the broadest consultation to take place”. That, to my mind, would have been the reasonable, prudent course to take. The government should say “We understand you are really against this, but this is so important that we will allow the broadest consultation to take place”. That is the sort of thing we would expect.

Here we are as the allies of the government on the bill. It is very rare for all opposition parties to want to consult broadly. Maybe we have different motives in doing that. Maybe some would want to inflame passions. Maybe others would just want to have this very well debated throughout the country so that everyone would know whether this was the right way to go. I hope that the positive motives would be the ones ascribed to the official opposition.

I vigorously denounce the committee events which took place. The words we use in the House are carefully chosen. I use that as the strongest denunciation of the process. We went in with the idea that witnesses would be heard. We had prepared our witnesses long in advance. Other parties had not expected this to be so hasty and did not even have their witnesses available.

We felt that surely the provinces should be brought into this process, and we presented a motion to that effect. This is very important. The Prime Minister said that. That motion was defeated. I will never understand the defeat of the motion to bring in every provincial legislature, the premiers' offices, at least to present a brief.

*Supply*

We were allowed 12 witnesses for this whole process. Who are our witnesses? We called for every provincial legislature and the territories to be our witnesses. That does not seem to me to be something that the official opposition should have to do. It would be a natural thing for the government to say "Please give us your input. Come if you will or present a brief if you will". It is a very strange process in my view.

• (1130)

I could use a host of words to describe the process at the committee such as arrogant and anti-democratic. That would sound chippy and partisan, so I will only say that I denounce vigorously the process at committee, and I am the ally. Why would the ally not get at least a hearing for something this important? I vigorously denounce it. I think it is a mistake.

[*Translation*]

This is playing into the sovereignists' hands, because they will be able to say this is undemocratic. They are right, because it is.

[*English*]

Let me turn then to the one thing that we gained from the committee. This is to say that we did gain something. We gained televised hearings. The hearings are televised. Even clause by clause is televised. That was not preferred by the government, but there was this one small gain. The public will be able to listen to and watch the witnesses. There are witnesses, literally at this moment, being heard on Bill C-20.

I will go back to the things that the official opposition wanted to do. We wanted to clarify the question. This is something we have vigorously agreed with and talked about back in the history of our presence in the House. A clear question is mandatory. We take it so far as to suggest a question.

[*Translation*]

The question is this. Should this province secede from Canada and become an independent state without any special legal link with Canada, yes or no?

[*English*]

I have listened to my colleagues in the Bloc say that there is no need for it because the assembly in Quebec will put forward a clear question. I say quite frankly that is an area in which we disagree.

The previous questions talked about more than one thing. Although every politically active person in Canada knew exactly what the question meant, I do not think the average Joes on the street, paying attention to politics periodically, had the absolute idea that there would be no more MPs in Ottawa from Quebec if it had passed. I do not believe for one second that they felt their passports would be taken away from them in the broader context. A plain question in my view is fair to Quebecers and fair to everyone else. Those are my comments on the clarification of the question.

On the clarification of the majority the minister and I had an interchange yesterday. He said that the official opposition position was not fair and not reasonable. In fact he used a very strong word. He said that it was irresponsible.

Let me explain to every person in Canada why we feel 50% plus one of the voters voting in the referendum is fair, reasonable and legitimate. First, the two previous referenda were run under those rules, in my judgment. I listened to the Prime Minister say "We won the last referendum" when it was 50.5%. It was very close. The Prime Minister himself said "Phew, we won".

It is difficult to change the rules in the middle of the game. It can be done if both parties agree. I listened to things such as amending the constitution for various reasons takes two-thirds. The parties agreed when they signed that constitution. If only the Fathers of Confederation had thought of this we would not have the problem. I agree that it is not the ideal percentage, but it is the one that the last two referenda were run under.

There are two sides to this question. The bill mentions that the boundaries of Quebec is one of the issues that needs to be discussed. If 50% plus one will break up Canada, in my estimation it could also break up a province trying to secede. Because the question would be clear and the majority would be clear it removes all the foggy. That is debatable. I will admit that.

• (1135)

I ask the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, if 50% plus one of all votes cast in a referendum is not acceptable, to tell me what is. We can debate that. With arguments well presented maybe he could change my mind and the mind of the official opposition. For various reasons that is not on the government agenda.

Once again that is a bit of a gift to those who say that they raised the bar, no matter what the percentage, to suit their purposes. That is risky and leaves an opening for those who want to say that Canada is not democratic. The committee proceedings and that particular point are not particularly democratic.

I also listened to the minister ask how we could possibly break up the country on a judicial recount. It does not matter what number we put on it. What about 60% plus one? Could there be a judicial recount there? What about 70% plus one? That is not an argument that has logic behind it.

[*Translation*]

The four major issues in the bill are minority rights, definition of borders, the native people's position and the sharing out of the federal debt.

There are other things too, such as citizenship and the use of the Canadian passport, the sharing out of federal assets, the maintenance of creditor confidence, the use of the Canadian currency, international recognition, participation by the province in question

*Supply*

in international agreements to which Canada is a party or its exclusion from them, as well as transportation and service corridors. All these things are important to me and I would like to understand why these issues are not included in the bill.

[*English*]

I talked about a battle between what I consider to be the status quo in Ottawa and the desires of Quebec. These are legitimate desires to have the original constitution respected. These are very similar to aspirations that come from outside Quebec. I was born in Quebec. I have lived in the west. I have family in Quebec. I have a reason to be concerned and interested in what happens there, more than just the Canadian flag.

I would like to give the message that there is another approach to continuing this battle. There is another way other than going down the road of the status quo versus those who feel they need to leave the country. We need to listen to one another. There are strong allies outside Quebec for the changes that Quebec is hoping to undertake.

[*Translation*]

In conclusion, I would like to say that millions of Canadians from outside Quebec also believe that we cannot accept the status quo. Quebec will therefore be able to count on friends and allies if it tries to change Canada. Quebec will notice that many people also consider that a fundamental reform of the federation is a priority.

• (1140)

[*English*]

**Mr. John Bryden (Wentworth—Burlington, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for his speech which I followed with great attention.

I would like to explore one aspect that he raised. That is the question of his party inviting the provinces to the committee to testify. In my reading of the legislation, the legislation deals entirely with federal powers, unless he has an opinion opposite, and I hope he will express it. As far as I can see there is nothing in this legislation that goes beyond what are the powers of this parliament.

Not to exclude the provinces absolutely, but I fail to see the utility of provincial testimony. I can see other groups from society, but I do not quite understand where he sees that the provinces themselves have something material to offer on what is entirely federal jurisdiction.

**Mr. Grant Hill:** Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the question. The issue for me is that this is why the Charlottetown accord and some of the other big narrow processes failed. They were done behind closed doors with a few individuals talking about them. That is something that does not equate to broad consultation on something this important.

I believe that the provinces have a significant part to play. Do I think they would agree? I believe all but one would agree with this bill. Do I think they might have some mechanism of improving the bill? I would invite them here to listen to that.

That has not been done. There have been very informal consultations. I would formally consult with the elected representatives on this issue and do it so that all Canadians would know that their provincial government had the same feelings. Beyond that we are back into the elitist mode which does not serve our country very well at all.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Gilles-A. Perron (Rivière-des-Mille-Îles, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, to put it bluntly, the member for Macleod insulted me in his speech.

He has insulted all Quebecers by saying that the people from Quebec are not intelligent enough to understand the question, that we politicians are the only intelligent people here. This is an insult, pure and simple.

Tell me, sir, why did 95% of Quebecers vote? Tell me which of them are intelligent: those who voted yes or those who voted no? Please tell me.

**Mr. Grant Hill:** In my view, Mr. Speaker, this is not a very emotional issue. If I think the question is not clear, that is my opinion. If the hon. member says the question is very clear, that is his opinion.

I think that for politicians, the question is very clear. If people in Quebec believe it will still be possible to elect members of parliament here after sovereignty, obviously, the question is not clear.

Why is the Bloc afraid of having a clear question, a question on sovereignty and nothing else? Quebecers are very intelligent, Bloc members too. In my view, with a clear question the battle is over.

[*English*]

**Mr. Gilles Bernier (Tobique—Mactaquac, PC):** Mr. Speaker, I listened very attentively to the speech delivered by the member for Macleod. I must say that I am impressed with the Reform Party.

The member said that there was a need to improve the term clarity. He also said that the Reform Party would want more consultations and more issues addressed. There must be more ways to improve federation. The member across the aisle on the Liberal side said that the reason the provinces should not be involved is that it is within federal jurisdiction, which is total nonsense.

I have a question for the member for Macleod. If he has all those points against the bill, why is the Reform Party or CRAP, whatever its name is, supporting the bill?

*Supply*

• (1145)

**Mr. Grant Hill:** Mr. Speaker, the support in principle for clarity allows me to say that the bill could be improved. I would hope that an intelligent member of parliament would try to listen to the improvements. I would hope that he would debate with me and try to say that those points are incorrect. It is a straightforward matter of saying that in principle clarity is important. Is there any other way to do this? I do not know.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Eugène Bellemare (Carleton—Gloucester, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I would like to commend the hon. member for MacLeod for his interest in the clarity bill. I have a question for him.

Does he believe that Canada should stay united? Does he believe in official languages, yes or no? I would like him to explain.

How it is that in the Standing Joint Committee on Official Languages the hon. member for MacLeod, as a representative of the Reform Party, voted against a proposal from the committee asking the province to designate as bilingual the national capital, the new city of Ottawa, which will be restructured by the year 2001. Why did he object to the city of Ottawa becoming bilingual?

**Mr. Grant Hill:** Mr. Speaker, I am for bilingualism. Ideally, everyone should speak many languages. I support voluntary bilingualism. I am against forced bilingualism. Here in Ottawa, as the member well knows, things are bilingual because there is a need.

**Mr. Benoît Sauvageau (Repentigny, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, first of all, I wish to say how unhappy I am, and I am trying to put this nicely, with the member for MacLeod who sits beside me. I am having trouble when he says that those who did not understand the question are not intelligent enough and when he goes even further and says that if anyone does not agree with the bill, it is for lack of intelligence.

My problem is that he saying that in this country—and this will be a clear question—the English are intelligent and the French are a bit thick? Is that what he is saying, yes or no?

**Mr. Grant Hill:** Absolutely not, Mr. Speaker.

**Mr. Benoît Sauvageau:** Mr. Speaker, the Liberal members of the ridings of Beauce, Laval West, Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine, Verdun, Lac-Saint-Louis, Brossard—La Prairie, Pierrefonds—Dollard, Vaudreuil—Soulanges, Brome—Missisquoi, Pontiac—Gatineau—Labelle, Anjou—Rivière-des-Prairies, Ahuntsic and Gatineau, who are not ministers from Quebec, but

members from Quebec, were probably ordered by their government not to talk about Bill C-20.

I would urge them, through you, Mr. Speaker, to ignore the party line on this, at least.

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. McClelland):** The hon. member for MacLeod should have an opportunity to reply.

**Mr. Benoît Sauvageau:** Yes, Mr. Speaker. And perhaps he will give us the benefit of his superiority and enlighten us. It is said that God does not need to be present for his will to be known.

I therefore ask the member for MacLeod to use his superior intelligence. Does he not believe that these members should ignore the party line, which prevents them from commenting officially on Bill C-20, and participate in questions and comments at the very least so that we may know what they think? Or does he think that they all aspire to ministerial positions and therefore want to remain silent?

• (1150)

[*English*]

**Mr. Grant Hill:** Mr. Speaker, I cannot imagine how the member could have misunderstood my comments when I said that the question that was asked in the last referendum in my opinion was not clear, that it could confuse.

The member may say that that somehow reflects on intelligence. That in my mind reflects on a very specific wish to make the question somewhat cloudy. It involved more than one issue. It had some negotiation with it. It talked about something other than sovereignty.

The Bloc members have been very plain in that they want the country to split up. They should say that and let us vote on that. I do not believe that is what most Quebecers want and they are very, very intelligent.

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. McClelland):** Before we resume debate, from my position in the chair, if you will give me a second for an editorial comment—

**An hon. member:** No, we do not.

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. McClelland):** Well I am going to take it anyway. I remember when most of us arrived here in 1993, there were many who were unilingual French or English. It is amazing the number who are able in a rudimentary fashion to converse in a second language. As I sit here watching this debate it is an interesting ironic thrust.

As the hon. member for Winnipeg—Transcona informed me, I should not be making editorial comments, so we will give the hon. member on debate the opportunity to admonish the Chair.

*Supply*

**Mr. Bill Blaikie (Winnipeg—Transcona, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, far be it from me. I want to address the motion before us. I compliment the Chair on his wise observations.

I rise on behalf of New Democrats in the House today to support the motion that has been moved by the Bloc Québécois. I think it points out what is wrong with the process that has accompanied the introduction of Bill C-20 and the process that has followed the introduction of Bill C-20.

New Democrats have been unhappy with the process right from the beginning. We were unhappy before we ever saw the bill. We felt that the Prime Minister was engaging in a rhetorical battle with the Bloc and with others in Quebec and creating an expectation about the bill that turned out not to be accurate. That is to say, there was some speculation prior to the introduction of the bill that the bill might actually set a particular percentage of support that would have to be met in any referendum. Not just separatists but federalists were also concerned about that particular prospect.

The bill was introduced by surprise when commitments had been made that the bill would not be introduced until the following week. Then all of a sudden on a Friday morning it was introduced. It was debated at second reading in the House. There were only three days of debate and closure was moved.

I know the government House leader likes to say he only moved closure because the Bloc Québécois members were not really interested in debating it, that they were using dilatory measures to preoccupy the House with matters other than Bill C-20. The fact is that we cannot win with the government House leader on this. If we use dilatory measures, then he says that we do not really want to debate it. And if we debate it, he says we have had enough debate, that we have had lots of opportunity to debate it.

When we have a bill like this one, which on the face of it, as we like to say in procedural matters is of *prima facie* import, having to do with the possible breakup of the country, it is something that parliament should debate in principle for a long time. A long time in this parliament has come to mean three days of debate. That is certainly not what a long time used to mean in terms of parliamentary debate.

• (1155)

When it comes to unimportant things, we can debate them forever. We can bring them forward this week, then three weeks later bring them up again, four weeks later bring them up again and five weeks later bring them up again. But if it is really important, we must not debate it at any length because somehow that transgresses on the government's understanding of how parliament works. It does not transgress on the understanding of how the opposition thinks parliament works and I do not think it trans-

gresses on the understanding of how the Canadian people think parliament should work. They would think "Why do those guys not spend their time on the important stuff and be more efficient with the not so important stuff". We have it exactly backward in parliament. When something is really important—

**Mr. Jim Jones:** Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. I notice there is not quorum in the House. Can you please call quorum?

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. McClelland):** The hon. member for Markham has requested a quorum call. There is not quorum. Call in the members.

*And the bells having rung:*

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. McClelland):** There is quorum.

**Mr. Bill Blaikie:** Mr. Speaker, I was commenting on the fact that tradition in this parliament, thanks to the Liberal government, has been that when important things come up for debate, we debate them only briefly and then time allocation is invoked whereas we seem to be able to debate unimportant things for a long time.

When we are debating things that even the government says are important, as the hon. member in his own way has pointed out, and I know it is not proper to refer to individual members not being here, but collectively speaking, government members are not in the Chamber. This is something that has been raised before with the government.

Government consistently shows contempt for the House of Commons by not taking upon itself the responsibility of maintaining quorum. This is something that in the past governments did as a matter of course, as a matter of routine. It was regarded as part of governmental responsibility. The government after all has 150 members yet it cannot muster four. Well, it has just mustered four of 150. Yet it expects the opposition to maintain quorum. But I am not here to talk about quorum. I am talking about the motion before us. As I said before, we support this motion because we believe the committee—

**Mr. Jerry Pickard:** Mr. Speaker, where are the rest of the hon. member's members?

**Mr. Bill Blaikie:** Mr. Speaker, we will match our percentage of members with theirs anytime unless they cannot do the math. It is kind of obvious to anyone who has two brain cells to rub together who has the higher percentage of members here in the House.

The problem is that the committee on Bill C-20 should have made a commitment to travel. It should have made a commitment to consult widely with Canadians in Quebec and in the rest of Canada about the procedure the government intends to establish with respect to the possible secession of any province and therefore with respect to the breakup of the country. It would only make

sense that this is the kind of process that should have been followed.

We have committees that travel the country asking Canadians about other things, about fishery matters, transport matters, agricultural matters. Almost every other matter has had a committee travel the country to ask Canadians what they think about that particular matter. Yet when it comes to something as important as breaking up the country or at least the procedure for doing so, or the procedure for a referendum to initiate negotiations to break up the country, the government says not only will we not travel, we will begin hearing witnesses on a Wednesday of one week and on Friday of the following week we will report the bill back to the House.

The plan in the committee is to hear the minister on Wednesday, as we did yesterday. By next Wednesday we will move into clause by clause study and in that period of time hear all the witnesses who want to appear, but not all the witnesses, just all the witnesses the committee decides to hear. That is a limited number; we are only going to hear 45 witnesses. We will be lucky if we can hear those in the little timeframe that the government has established. I predict that we will probably have to extend the life of the committee anyway because witnesses have lives. Witnesses just cannot kind of pack up their lives and say, "Oh, the Liberals need me", or "The Bloc needs me", or "someone else needs me and I must truck on down to Ottawa and destroy my schedule for next week because the process that the House of Commons has decided, pursuant to the will of the Liberal majority in the committee, means that I don't have any time to plan ahead. I don't have any time to write a brief. I don't have any time to gather my thoughts. I just have to get down there and present".

• (1200)

It may well be that the government plan will falter to some degree on the fact that witnesses simply cannot fit themselves into the government timetable. There will be a certain amount of justice in that.

We support the motion. We feel that the committee should have travelled. The motion also includes something having to do with televising, but my understanding is that the committee is being televised. I am not sure why that is in the motion. It seems to be a bit redundant. It is like protesting something that is not there. The committee is being televised. Why protest the fact that it is not being televised or why move a motion to televise it when it is being televised. There is a certain kind of inadequacy in the motion that we will overlook because we support the spirit of the motion which is that the way the government has handled this particular bill has been sorely inadequate and in violation, I think, of the best traditions of parliament when it comes to dealing with things that are very important.

However, Canadians should not let our objections to the process obscure the fact that we do support the bill in principle, that we

### *Supply*

support the view that there is a role for parliament, pursuant to the opinion of the Supreme Court of Canada, in laying out what parliament would regard as the conditions that would create an obligation to negotiate on the part of the rest of Canada with a province of Canada having to do with secession.

The Supreme Court of Canada, in its opinion, said that there would have to be a clear question and a clear majority. It said that what constituted a clear question and a clear majority would have to be determined by the political actors; in other words, the court said that it would not determine that itself.

Surely no one would want to argue that the Parliament of Canada is not one of the political actors that the Supreme Court of Canada had in mind. Surely no one would want to say that the only political actors that the Supreme Court of Canada might have had in mind are provincial governments alone or a provincial government alone; that is to say, the provincial government of the province that brings in a referendum. I do not think that was what the court was saying. I do not think anyone could credibly argue that was what the court was saying.

The bill is saying that, yes, the Parliament of Canada has certain responsibilities, just like the provincial legislatures of provinces have certain responsibilities, and like the National Assembly of Quebec, it has responsibilities, it has rights and it has the right to ask any question it likes in any referendum it likes. That right coexists with the right of this parliament to say that only a certain kind of question, responded to by a clear majority, will create an obligation on the part of this place, the Parliament of Canada, to negotiate secession. It does not eliminate the possibility of other kinds of referendums on association, or partnership or new forms of the federation. All those kinds of things are still available and they are available in the ordinary course of politics.

A province may want to have a referendum in order to demonstrate that the people are behind its new constitutional proposal for a new division of powers or whatever. That is all part of the ordinary political process.

• (1205)

What the bill talks about is an extraordinary political situation in which a province would ask the Government of Canada to begin negotiations on secession. It seems to me that parliament would be shirking its duty if it said "Oh, we can't have anything to say about that because that is up to the seceding province. It has to determine that". This is not a credible position.

We have responsibilities here in parliament as the representatives of all the people in Canada, including the people of Quebec. We have our own jurisdiction in Quebec. Quebec is not a separate country, and we hope it never will be. However, it is not yet a separate country and therefore the federal government has its own jurisdiction in Quebec. It has a right, on behalf of people in Quebec

*Supply*

and people outside of Quebec, to determine what the conditions would be that would create the obligation to negotiation secession. That is what the bill does.

Earlier on I talked about political actors. I am not talking about what goes on during question period. I am talking about the language of the supreme court which talked about political actors, and the political actors being the ones who would have to determine a clear question and a clear majority.

What we find unfortunate in the bill, not just the process, is two things with respect to how the bill delineates who are the political actors. There are two sections in the bill in which the government lists people whose views it would have to take into account in determining whether or not a question was clear—and that would happen prior to a referendum—and in determining whether or not a majority was clear. As the bill stands now, that would happen after a referendum.

Who does the government list? It lists the Parliament of Canada, obviously, and the provinces, the territories and the Senate, which I will get to in a minute, and any other views that it might deem relevant. It has the same list with respect to a clear question and a clear majority.

We in the NDP contend that this particular list is faulty in two grievous ways. First, it includes the Senate. It includes this unappointed body and gives to it a role that we feel is unwarranted, undeserved and not necessary in any constitutional way in the determination that those sections of the bill lay out. Having given this undeserved status to the Senate, the bill then compounds the moral offence by not giving status to the aboriginal people of provinces that hold such referendums.

Here we have a situation in which provinces and territories are listed. The government has to take the views of these people into account, as well as the views of the Senate or anybody else. I guess maybe aboriginal people fall under anybody else. Yet, these are the same people, in the case of the Cree and the Inuit in Quebec, who won the last referendum for the federalist cause. These are the people whose solid block of votes for Canada made the difference between a winning referendum and a losing referendum in 1995 and the government has the unmitigated gall to ignore them and to treat them with contempt. This is the one thing that unites federalists and separatists in this country.

When we see the process that is going on with respect to Bill 99 in Quebec and in Quebec City, the aboriginal people there in that context are ignored as well and not given full recognition of their rights and status. I might add that that committee is not travelling either. It is not going to northern Quebec to get the opinion of the Cree, when we hear all the self-righteousness of the Bloc. Two wrongs do not make a right. The committee in this House should show up the committee in Quebec City and do the kind of travelling that is not being done there.

Those of us who are New Democrats find this to be a major flaw in the bill. We hope the government will see its way to amending this. I asked the minister in committee yesterday why he did not have the aboriginal leadership of a province listed in this. He said that he listed only the people who were constitutional. I told him that the native people are in the constitution. I said that I was there when they were put into the new constitution when it was patriated in 1981. He then said that it is people who are involved in the constitutional amendment process. I said that the supreme court did not say “take into account the views of constitutional political actors”. I would argue that aboriginal people are constitutional political actors, but let us leave that aside for a minute. In the government’s own bill it lists the territories. The territories do not have a part in the constitutional amending process, yet their views have to be taken into account, and rightly so.

• (1210)

I said to the minister that since he has the territories in there, why does he not have the aboriginal people in there. The minister said that the territories are not in the bill. I told him to check the bill. He had a little huddle, came back and said that I was right, that the territories are in the bill.

**An hon. member:** Who wrote that bill?

**Mr. Bill Blaikie:** I thought the minister wrote the bill but I now have to take that back. Somebody else clearly wrote the bill.

I am not trying to be too cute here, but there is a good case to be made, both in terms of the bill itself having listed the territories, and rightly so, and the rights of aboriginal people as established both in the constitution and by constitutional convention going back to the Charlottetown accord when Ovide Mercredi was at the table. Are we retreating now from what was accomplished then in terms of aboriginal people having a place at the table?

I submit that in order for the bill to be as just as the government wants to portray it as being, aboriginal people should be included in that list of people whose views have to be taken into account. They should be listed clearly, definitively and separately from everyone else.

The bill should also provide that in any negotiation of secession, subsequent to a referendum with a clear question and a clear majority, that aboriginal people are not just people whose interests have to be taken into account, which is the way the bill reads now, but should be part of the negotiating process.

Having done that, I think the government would be much better able to come before the House and say that this bill is indeed a piece of democratic legislation. I do not accept the view of the Bloc that it is antidemocratic. There is still all kinds of room there for sovereignists to win. If they really feel Quebecers want to have a sovereign country then they should not be afraid of a piece of legislation that asks them to ask a clear question. If they get their clear majority they can have their country.

*Supply*

**Mr. John Bryden (Wentworth—Burlington, Lib.):** Madam Speaker, it is a pleasure to hear the member for Winnipeg—Transcona speak on this issue because he is a member with great experience. But I think he has actually misread the act in some respects, and there is a contradiction in what he said.

In the course of his speech, he made allusions several times to the fact that Bill C-20 sets conditions on the question and the prospect of separation. But I submit that is not what Bill C-20 does at all. What Bill C-20 does is it sets limits on the government. It says very clearly that the government cannot enter into negotiations before the House of Commons has determined whether the question is clear or not and other aspects of the percentage and that kind of thing.

In my view—and I would like the member to comment on this—this is quite a different kettle of fish, shall we say. Limiting the government is something that indeed all members of parliament, even those of us on the backbench on the government side, would like to see a government limited from time to time and indeed this bill does that. I would suggest to the member that not only does it do that, but that everything in the bill is entirely within the scope of the House of Commons. It is not something that is inconsistent with what we can do as members of parliament because we have added no additional powers to parliament. We have merely limited the powers of government, which I would have thought would be entirely in keeping with what this parliament should be doing at any time.

• (1215)

**Mr. Bill Blaikie:** Madam Speaker, I am not sure whether the hon. member is fishing for differences that are not there. I never said that it is was not within the purview of parliament. In fact, I thought I had made an argument about why it was within the purview of parliament.

With respect to the language of conditions, I used the word conditions in an entirely different sense than the hon. member attributed to me. What I said was that the bill outlines what would create the conditions for an obligation to negotiate. I am trying to stick very carefully to the supreme court ruling. It said that only after a clear question and a clear majority—a clear question being a question that was very clear about the fact that it had to do with separation and with the province holding the referendum on becoming an independent country and with a clear majority on that clear question—would there be an obligation to negotiate. That is the sense in which I was using the word conditions.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Benoît Sauvageau (Repentigny, BQ):** Madam Speaker, I have several questions for the hon. member from the New Democratic Party.

First, he talked a little about the clear question. I would now like to hear him describe his idea of a clear majority.

Second, he should explain the biological or genetic advantage that the people from Winnipeg, from his riding or from his province have over Quebecers to understand what is a clear question. What is missing biologically or genetically in Quebec the explanation surely lies there so that we cannot understand what is a clear question while they can?

Why should we need the advice of the hon. member from the northeast part of Prince Edward Island, a member whom I do not know but for whom I have much respect? Why should his advice be superior to that of the national assembly that, unanimously or by a majority, could determine what is a clear question? I would like him to enlighten us about that as well.

While I am not very experienced, I know that we cannot mention absent members in the House, but we can present members. The hon. member for Anjou—Rivière-des-Prairies who is here surely has much to say on this issue, but he has not risen since this morning. I rose in part to take his place.

The hon. member for Brome—Missisquoi has been reading *La Presse* all morning. Perhaps he would also have something to say about Bill C-20.

I am looking at the member for Brossard—La Prairie, who has been twiddling his thumbs all morning. He might have had something to say about Bill C-20. I could say the same for the member for Bourassa.

Members from Quebec have been instructed to shut up or else they are simply devoid of ideas and afraid to stand up. I am therefore speaking on their behalf.

In closing, I would like to ask the member from the New Democratic Party if he thinks the following question is clear, and I will read it slowly:

Do you accept and approve the settlement agreement dated, for reference purposes, the 14th day of December 1999, between the Montagnais band of Lac-Saint-Jean and Her Majesty the Queen in right of Canada?

That was the first question. I will now read the second one:

Do you agree to sanction, pursuant to sections 38(1) and 39 of the Indian Act, the absolute transfer to Her Majesty the Queen in right of Canada by the Montagnais band of Lac-Saint-Jean of all its rights and those of its members to all parcels of reserve lands on concession IX of the Ouatichouan township?

By voting "YES", you authorize the Chief of the Montagnais band of Lac-Saint-Jean or any other member of the band council duly authorized by resolution to sign on behalf of the band council, the band itself and its members all documents, and to take all measures required to put into effect the settlement agreement and the absolute transfer of all parcels of reserve lands on concession IX of the Ouatichouan township. Yes or no?

*Supply*

Does this question, written by the governmental party without any consultation, seem clear to the hon. member?

• (1220)

[*English*]

**Mr. Bill Blaikie:** Madam Speaker, I want to thank the hon. member for leaving me so much time to answer his questions, for having gone on and on about something that I had nothing to say about, and for pointing out in his own procedurally quirky way the absence of people that he is not supposed to point out the absence of.

With respect to the last question, I know what the member is up to. He wants me to say it is a clear question. Then he is going to point out that 50% plus one is enough for that, and then he is going to extrapolate from there that 50% plus one is good enough for any other referendum.

Of course, what is debatable here is whether a referendum having to do with the secession of a province like Quebec is in fact a qualitatively different kind of referendum, and whether 50% plus one is all that would be required. That is part of the debate that is going on in committee.

There are people in all parties who feel that 50% plus one is the standard, and there are people who do not. Whether it comes to be something that is actually in the bill, or whether amendments are moved to that effect, we shall see.

The member also brought up this genetic, biological argument, which I think was unfortunate. The fact of the matter is that, yes, voters in my riding, voters in Prince Edward Island, which I think he also mentioned, voters everywhere in Canada ought to have a say through their parliament about what the conditions would be which would obligate them to negotiate the secession of a province that contains some 10 million of their fellow citizens from their country.

As far as I am concerned that is self-evident. I do not think we are non-participating spectators in the process that would break up our country. I am sorry, but I have to disagree with my colleague from the Bloc. I think that all Canadians have a say in what conditions would create an obligation on the part of their government to negotiate the secession of a particular province from Canada, and I make no apologies for that.

Quebecers have their rights too. This relates to the other thing the member said. He was listing members from Quebec and why they have not said anything. He believes that in order to be a true Quebecer one has to agree with him. These other people who have not spoken up in favour of the position he advocates, they are somehow not true and real Quebecers. I think this is one of the

more despicable elements of the way the Bloc members conduct themselves with respect to this debate, that somehow people who do not agree with them are not real Quebecers.

I allow for a Canada in which Quebecers can defend their right, not the right of the rest of Canada, but their right to have a clear question and a clear majority, their right not to be snookered by a separatist government that has a strategy to get them into the lobster pot that Jacques Parizeau described.

That is a democratic principle which respects the rights of all Quebec citizens and not just the rights of sovereignists and separatists to cleave to their own particular strategy.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. André Bachand (Richmond—Arthabaska, PC):** Madam Speaker, during my speech, I will certainly raise points that may be somewhat redundant. Since I do not want to sound redundant, I will put some emphasis on certain points that were raised this morning.

I will start by taking a look at the motion brought forward by the Bloc Quebecois.

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

**Mr. André Bachand:** I can see that, by my mere presence, I woke up a number of government members and I am very happy about that.

The motion before us today arises from the frustration expressed by the four opposition parties about the approach used by the government to decide how the committee on Bill C-20 will proceed.

It felt a little strange to hear what the eight members delegated by the government to deal with this issue had to say. They all said the same thing, almost word for word “You know, with just three clauses, this bill is not all that important. It is not very detailed. There is no reason to worry”.

• (1225)

We realize that it is indeed important. Besides the great legal and constitutional issues raised by this bill, which I will address in a moment, the fact remains that it stirs up emotions and triggers reactions. As a matter of fact, this bill is the result of a poll taken last summer by the federal government and paid for with our taxes.

What I really want to discuss is what happened at committee on Monday night when we were trying to decide how to operate. We discussed whether the committee should travel. The government said no, the committee should not travel. Its position was clear: people can come to Ottawa, it is not that far. If people from Quebec want to come to Ottawa, the government will pay their expenses. It is as simple as that. That is the decision that was made. The government said “The committee will not travel”.

We then thought “Okay, the committee will not travel, but why?” And the answer came back “No time”. It is clear, you are either for or against it. We were told we would not travel. We said “Okay, it is fine, we cannot travel”.

Then we asked “Will there be any time for people to prepare, because we are breaking new ground here?” Not only can we not travel, but we are now being told that we must be done by Friday. An member of the opposition introduced a motion requesting an extension until February 28, to give people time to put a brief together. The government said “No, there is no time. It is now or never. Your mind must be made by now; this is a simple bill. Show up now or forget it”.

We suggested publishing a notice in the papers to let people know when the committee hearing would be held. The government said “No, you cannot do that”. “Could we at least send an invitation to the provinces, we asked, telling them that we will be doing some legislative work and considering an important bill that concerns them in certain regards? Could we simply invite them, to tell them that we are here and that we will try to do a good job?” The answer was “No, that is out of the question”. We then asked that the committee be allowed to hear witnesses who wish to appear. Again, the government said “No, that is out of the question”.

The committee will hear only 45 witnesses. We asked “Does this mean that we will all submit our lists of witnesses and the steering committee will decide?” Again, the answer was no. Limits are being put on the number of witnesses by political party. Some members suggested we might look at that together. The government said “No, this has been decided; there will be 15 witnesses for the Liberal Party, 12 for the Reform Party, 10 for the Bloc Québécois, four for the NDP and, because we are very kind, another four for the Progressive Conservative Party”. “Does this mean we may invite other witnesses, we asked?” Again the answer was no. A committee member asked “Could someone who wants to appear, who is following the committee proceedings on television, invite himself? This is a democracy. One may want to be heard and say ‘I have questions and I would like to address them’.” The answer remains no, he cannot.

For the first time—for one of very few times at least—to be a witness at a legislative committee studying a bill, one has to be sponsored by political party. Those who have no connections, like the non-aligned people—because I was asking the question: what do non-aligned people do? Imagine this, the government will invite witnesses who will toss ideas that might be more or less close to ours, but at least we will discuss. As for the others, the doors are closed. This is a tightly closed committee.

**Mr. Antoine Dubé:** Undemocratic.

**Mr. André Bachand:** Exactly. The hon. member for Lévis just said it. Is the bill undemocratic? We will discuss this later. But is

### *Supply*

the legislative committee democratic and open? The answer is no. This is absolutely terrible.

We will, of course, support the Bloc Québécois motion asking for the committee to travel. But when we say that the committee will travel, whether you like it or not, that means that more witnesses, maybe, will be heard, that we will take more time. We are talking about a bill that, for the Liberals, has become unimportant. We talked about a flip flop by some opposition parties on Bill C-20. But it is quite a flip flop that the Liberal Party has made on the most important bill ever introduced in this House. But it is not important, there are many other things to do. That is quite a flip flop, is it not? The Prime Minister should look at himself in the mirror. That is quite a flip flop.

We are only hoping that, in effect, this will be discussed because it is not clear. The role of the committee is not clear. The bill is not really clear either.

• (1230)

We just hope that the government will wake up and say to the committee: “Listen, you are having problem getting witnesses in the short term because you are pushing people around.” The people are told: “Come and appear before the committee. These are the days and time of the hearings. You show up on this day, at that time, or do not bother. You either show up or you do not.” Then I go: “Wait a minute, I have previous commitments. I am a member of a board or of an organization.” And they say: “No, this is it. Either you find it important or you do not. You come on that day or you do not show up at all.”

This is an outrage, a slap in the face by the committee. And the funny part is that we had our “Cassoulet”, as he was called.

Members will remember that children’s program on Radio-Canada called “Plum-pouding”. The star of that show was the father of Marc Labrèche, a comedian whose first name I forget now; he played a French spy. He would take off his hat and call his boss to receive orders. He always said “What do I do now?” The name of the character was Cassoulet.

What I am about to say is unbelievably funny. There was a Cassoulet, the parliamentary assistant to the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, in committee until I rose in the name of the opposition. He was listening to the proceedings, but his cellular phone was on all the time. He took notes and brought them to the parliamentary secretary, who then said “Here is my position”. The connection was direct. There was another invisible player and I can tell members it was not the Holy Ghost, but minister’s office or the office of the government House leader.

This is insulting. It was funny to see, really. However, it was insulting for the eight Liberals present. They had absolutely nothing to say. The cellular phone determined everything. I agree that technology is important nowadays, but I do not agree with Cassoulet and his cell phone. This makes no sense whatsoever.

*Supply*

The motion will probably be defeated because Cassoulet, the House leader, the whip, and the Prime Minister will say no, we vote against that. Let us get it out of the way. We have important issues to deal with. The government has a heavy legislative program.

Yesterday, we had the opportunity to talk briefly about Bill C-20, the bill dealing with the clarity of the referendum question. If it were so clear, the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs would probably never have submitted a 16 page document dealing with a three clause bill, three clauses that are supposed to define what negotiations will be in the event of a secession. Is that clear? No, it is not. The bill makes no mention of the question nor does it specify what the majority will be. The committee has already started hearing witnesses, at least those who have been able to come before it, but they do not agree.

Everybody wants a clear question and a clear majority. What everybody is really saying is that if Quebecers decide to get out of this federation, everybody must agree on this. We do not need a bill to do this. I asked this question to the minister, because it is important.

We are currently considering a lot of legislation. There is, for instance, Bill C-23, which contains hundreds of clauses. They are significant. These bills mean something to us. They call for our careful consideration, as citizens and as members of this House. We did not hesitate to propose amendments.

The minister said that we must not complicate things. He said that if Quebec ever leaves this country and thus breaks Canada apart, things will have to be kept simple. Maybe because it will be too complicated. This bill is supposed to enlighten everybody, but it does so only partially.

I want to raise some points that show how unclear this bill is. Of course, the question is not clear, because it is not spelled out. The majority is not clear either, because it is not defined.

Yesterday, I asked the minister about this. For those who were unable to watch that wonderful program live, I said "The only thing you indulged in in your presentation, Minister,—and even in French I used the English term—is Quebec bashing". It was bashing, and nothing else. People need only read the minister's speech. The only province associated with secession was Quebec.

I therefore asked the minister "If you wanted the bill to be so clear, Minister, why did you not have the balls to be clear and use Quebec and not a province in all three clauses? Are you telling us that another province wants to separate? That is certainly not the case, since you spoke only of Quebec in the whole 20 minutes. You attacked almost all democratic institutions. Thus I contend that you do not want to use the term Quebec". The answer was "We do not want to use the term Quebec". Why? The supreme court opinion

was about what? Cape Breton? Prince Edward Island? No, it was about Quebec. The title mentions Quebec. The preamble mentions Quebec.

• (1235)

They thought it might be dangerous to attack Quebec directly, so they removed the term Quebec from the clauses. The minister avoided the issue and said "Well, I will not reply to that".

The other question I asked him was "Is this constitutional amendment?" He answered "Yes". I asked "What amending formula will apply?" Because the supreme court referred to a constitutional amendment. "What amending formula? The 7-50 formula? Unanimity? Which one?" He replied "We do not know, we will see". I said "What? You are supposed to be clear, and you do not know? There is a problem". If the 7-50 formula applies, the weight of some provinces increases or diminishes, depending on whether or not Quebec is a partner to that amending formula.

I even went further because, sometimes—most often in the rest of Quebec, among anglophones and allophones and even among some Quebecers—people are afraid of telling the truth and asking the real questions.

In this case, it is Mr. Bouchard, in Quebec City, and the Prime Minister and member of Shawinigan, in this House. Let us suppose there is a yes vote on a clear question. The result will be clear. But who negotiates for whom? How will the people of Ontario accept that Quebecers share the debt and the assets of the country? Are the hon. members of this House comfortable with this? Probably not. Am I comfortable with the idea of entrusting a Quebecer, namely the member for Shawinigan, with the task of negotiating? I am not sure.

What do we do with the 75 members from Quebec, men and women who were elected democratically, whatever their political stripe? Are they still part of the constitution? If the constitution has to be amended unanimously, does Quebec have a veto? If a negotiating committee on secession is struck will Quebec be part of it?

If members ask those questions to the members of the government party, they will say "André, do not raise those points, people in the west will react negatively". I say "Of course, it is all fine and well not raise those points, but do you want clarity, yes or no? If you do not, stop. If you do not, you have to go all the way". Let us ask the real questions.

**Mr. John Bryden:** The Bloc members and the Conservatives know that.

**An hon. member:** We are Quebecers first and foremost.

*Supply*

**Mr. André Bachand:** I believe one can be a proud Quebecer and a proud Canadian. Earlier the NDP member told the member for Repentigny that being a Quebecer does not necessarily mean being a sovereignist, and being a Canadian does not necessarily mean being a Liberal.

**An hon. member:** Put that in your pipe.

**Mr. André Bachand:** The court talks about political actors, as mentioned by several speakers. Why is it that the federal government decided it was the political actor? It wants to have the lead role, maybe like Bruno Pelletier in “Notre-Dame de Paris”, or something like that. It wants to be applauded, but this is not what the supreme court said.

It said “it will be for the political actors to determine what constitutes a clear question”. It will be for the political actors to determine what constitutes a clear majority, to engage in a negotiating process, to decide what its results will be. Liberal members are political actors. We are political actors. The provinces are political actors.

We could go much further and broaden the scope. The Liberal government has highjacked the supreme court’s opinion, and is serving it up its own way. It put people in a comfort zone regarding the future of the country. It told “With this bill, Quebec will never separate; you can sleep on both ears, everything is under control”. We must remember what the Prime Minister was saying before the 1995 referendum “Everything is being looked after”.

• (1240)

I am definitely not a sovereignist; I am definitely not a Liberal. But I most definitely have questions. For us in the Conservative Party this bill has been a hard blow. We have members outside Quebec. But we should abide fully by everything the supreme court said.

As I asked the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs yesterday, what is a political actor? He answered with a non-answer. I said “If the provinces are political actors, do you suggest that the provinces pass the same bill, this bill that is so clear? The provinces are, so far as I know, equal partners in the federation, so if they are equal partners, are you prepared to suggest that they adopt the same bill?” The minister replied “Not really; it is not necessary.”

I also asked whether or not we like the Senate, until there is a constitutional change, have to live with it. It needs to be improved, clearly. We Conservatives agree with that. But how is it that the Senate has no representative on this legislative committee of the House of Commons?

We have a bicameral system after all, two chambers. Whether we like how it works, or not, we have to live with procedures. Whether or not we like to have the wool pulled over our eyes by the Liberal majority in a legislative committee, we must unfortunately live with it.

Power must be properly exercised because it is something we run into head on pretty quickly. I asked the minister “So what about the Senate?” “Oh, we don’t know about that”. But the Senate has a right of veto on this. There are Liberal senators traipsing about with a letter demanding an amendment, because the government is not even respecting the parliamentary system. When it hits the Senate, the senators are going to tell you “Here we are, and maybe we are appointed, but there are some in our bunch that would like to do their job properly and to have some recognition. Maybe not individual recognition, but we do have upper chamber. Show at least some respect for your own parliament”.

I followed up with two questions, with which I shall close. “Are you open to amendments?” Because in a parliament system—

**Some hon. members:** No.

**Mr. André Bachand:** The answer was “No, it is not necessary. It is clear and quite simple. You are for or against”. It is a slap in the face. As the parliamentary process goes, it is a kick in the pants. The government brings in a bill and says “You may consider the bill, but we will not change it.” Not at all. What purpose are the witnesses going to serve in committee? One witness would say “I think the majority should be 70 %.” The government is going to say “Good”. The witness would add “The territory of Quebec is indivisible”. To which the government would reply “Oh, I do not know about that”.

Why refer the bill to a legislative committee if the government cannot make a difference?

My last question, and I will finish with that, was for the minister: “If the bill is so simple, so clear, so directly in line with the Supreme Court of Canada, before Royal Assent, since you have the prerogative to do so, could you not ask the Supreme Court to establish if it is contrary to the opinion of the Supreme Court, to the existing legislation in Canada and to the Canadian Constitution or in keeping with them?” The answer was “No”.

[English]

**Mr. John Bryden (Wentworth—Burlington, Lib.):** Madam Speaker, I thank the hon. member for his excellent speech. He covered a lot of territory there.

**Mr. Gilles Bernier:** Because he knows what he is talking about.

*Supply*

**Mr. John Bryden:** He may know what he is talking about. I hope he does. At any rate, he raised one issue that makes me question whether he knows what he is talking about. He made allusions several times to the fact that Bill C-20 sets parameters on the events and the negotiations leading to the secession of a part of Canada or a province of Canada.

• (1245)

I submit to the member that if he reads the act very carefully he will see that the act exactly does not do that. It does not define the question. It does not define the number required for a majority vote, and it does not define the actual conditions of the negotiations. It precisely avoids doing that.

What it very clearly does instead—and I would ask the member to agree with me or disagree with me, and if he disagrees to please explain—is limits the power of a government, any government, a future government of this country, to negotiate with a province on secession. It says that government must first go to the House of Commons and determine whether or not the House of Commons approves of the certain events leading up to the negotiations that government might want to do, for example the question has to be clear, the House of Commons has to determine what is a clear majority, and so on and so forth.

I submit to the member that in doing so, in limiting the power of future governments in negotiating with a province that wishes to secede perhaps on an ambiguous question, what in fact the government is doing is withdrawing from the separatists in Quebec. I do not necessarily say this to members of the Bloc Québécois because they are very good parliamentarians, but it withdraws from the separatists in Quebec of having one of their winning conditions. That winning condition would be a leader of a government side who would be willing to negotiate on an unclear question and might have a majority in the House that has such party discipline that they would follow that leader no matter what he did.

Basically the winning condition that we are trying to avoid by Bill C-20 is surely the leader of the Conservative Party who we know, if he ever did come to power, would be instantly ready to negotiate on an ambiguous question.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. André Bachand:** Mr. Speaker, on the last comment of the hon. member, I should say that if Mr. Clark were in power, if there were a new government, we would probably not be faced with the same situation.

Two things I want to say. When the hon. member says “limit the power of this government”, it is not true. He should read the opinion of the Supreme Court and examine the bill, then he would see that it is not a question of limiting the power but of increasing it. They are grasping, claiming to be political actors. The rules for

the vote are not altered. What percentage will be needed in this House to say that the question and the majority are clear and to start negotiating the dismantling of our country? Will it be 50% plus one or will there be new rules?

Under Bill C-20, the federal government would force all of Canada to negotiate the terms and conditions of secession, if 49% of members in the House said the question was not clear and 51% said it was.

The federal government has given itself every power. This bill may not seem important today, but I dare the government to take it to the supreme court right now.

The member says the bill does not mention a clear question or suggest a clear majority and a negotiation process. I will reiterate what the hon. member said. We in the Progressive Conservative Party will take his note and his remarks and send that to the people of Ontario and western Canada. We will tell them that the clarity bill is not clear on the question. It is not clear on the majority and it is not clear on the negotiation process.

Therefore, I want to thank the hon. member personally and on behalf of the Conservative Party and all the federalists who still hope to accomplish something in this country.

[*English*]

**Mr. John Bryden:** Mr. Speaker, I am delighted. We appear to be having a kind of dialogue here. I draw the member's attention to a subclause 2(4) of the bill, and I will only read it in part, which says very clearly: “The Government of Canada shall not enter into negotiations on the terms” of a province seceding “unless—there has been a clear expression of a will by a clear majority of the population of that province”.

• (1250)

The act is absolutely clear. It says a government will not enter into negotiations unless parliament has approved. What we have simply done by this bill is that we have given parliament the power, not government the power. We have given parliament the power to decide whether any government, especially a Conservative government, shall ever enter into negotiations to break up this country. As for myself, I will trust parliament any day over a government that might be led by a Mr. Joe Clark.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. André Bachand:** Mr. Speaker, this is good news. If we ever come to power, and he leaves, so much the better. That is good news. I cannot disagree with that.

My point is that, according to him, without a clear question and a clear majority there is no negotiation. He says “This parliament is given the power”. But the way it works is that there is no exceptional provision in the bill.

The government now wants to include an exceptional provision in case secession occurs, but not within our own operation. They eliminate all the provinces, all the other partners and the other place and they say “Here is where it is done”. And they do not change one iota of parliamentary proceedings. Who are the Cassoulets in the Liberal realm? The PMO decides. On an issue as crucial as this one, why did it not say it would be decided by a free vote in the House to the two thirds representing seven provinces, minimum. Why not have done that? Why could the government not take the spirit of the amendment to the Constitution of 1982 and establish it here in this House?

Before someone on the other side of the House is empowered to negotiate the break up of this country, it will take more than 50% plus one, from all appearances. There should be a majority of the members here, representing a majority of the regions of the country, before a Prime Minister, who has done nothing to save the country, can go and negotiate the end of it.

[*English*]

**Mr. John Bryden:** Mr. Speaker, I am delighted actually because the member wants to refer everything to the supreme court which, I have to say, follows the tradition of the Mulroney Tories who made laws so vague that we are still cleaning up the mess with the supreme court.

I point out to the speaker that the supreme court in this country comes under the Supreme Court of Canada Act. The supreme court comes under this parliament. So what he wants us to do is to refer the question to a body that in fact is under this parliament. There is a sort of confusion. We are going to go round in circles here.

Why does he not become a real true parliamentarian and take control in this House of the future of the country and use this House as the forum for debate and decision rather than going outside to an unelected body like the supreme court?

[*Translation*]

**Mr. André Bachand:** Mr. Speaker, it is the Liberals who started the supreme court “game”, not me or the opposition parties. Who made the reference to the supreme court? Who said “We do not know what to do with the sovereignist, nationalist, and independentist movement in Quebec. Help. We call on the wisdom of the supreme court judges. We will ask them questions and hope they will side with us”? Who said that? Not me. We were opposed. We are of the opinion that, within a country, people are supposed to talk to each other, to understand each other, and to make compromises. Clearly, that is not how they see things across the way.

Yesterday, the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs stated—and it said it all, a wonderful, poetic statement—“I respect the supreme court of my country”. The minister should teach a lesson to the hon. member and show him how to respect the judiciary system of this country.

### *Supply*

**Mrs. Suzanne Tremblay (Rimouski—Mitis, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, I am really pleased to take part in the debate on the opposition motion on Bill C-20 put forward by the Bloc Québécois.

Some may think the Bloc Québécois is exaggerating or wants to set a precedent by asking the government that the legislative committee on Bill C-20 be allowed to travel across Quebec and Canada. But there are three fundamental reasons for the Bloc Québécois’ request.

● (1255)

First, it is common practice for the House of Commons to have committees travel. Since 1994, parliamentary committees have travelled throughout Canada and abroad on more than 60 occasions. A few examples will prove to those listening that the government does not stint on money and resources when it is not worried about consulting the public.

The Standing Committee on National Defence and Veterans Affairs travelled to Germany in January of 1999.

The Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights travelled to the eastern provinces in March of 1999.

The Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs and International Trade travelled to Quebec City, St-Hyacinthe, Montreal, Halifax, Winnipeg, Toronto and Vancouver in March and April of 1999.

The Standing Committee on Natural Resources and Government Operations travelled to British Columbia in May of 1999.

Before signing the Nisga’a treaty, the Liberal government had the committee responsible for examining this treaty travel to British Columbia to hear from citizens there who wished to voice their concerns about the treaty.

Finally, as we speak, the Standing Committee on Fisheries and Oceans is now travelling in British Columbia and in the State of Washington.

The second reason is that all the opposition parties, which represent 62% of voters, have asked that the committee be allowed to travel. The Reform member for Macleod has accused the Liberals of not respecting Canadians or democracy. The NDP leader and member for Winnipeg—Transcona said the following, and I quote: “The government has acted not expeditiously but with arrogance. It is showing its disdain for the rules and traditions of the House on matters of such importance. This bill deserves more attention and different treatment”.

These are not the words of a Bloc Québécois member or a sovereignist, far from it.

In addition to the opposition parties, a large number of groups of Canadians and Quebecers, a large number of individuals, have

*Supply*

called for the committee to travel in order to make it easier for the witnesses to take part. Who are these groups that are deploring the government's tactics for looking at Bill C-20?

Let us see what the spokespersons for some of them think about the government's steamroller tactics. Let us see what they think, which is probably what is stopping the Liberal government from letting the committee travel, for fear of hearing the truth about Bill C-20.

Marc Laviolette, president of the CSN, said "Basically, the Prime Minister ought quite simply to pass legislation stating that Quebec is not entitled to secede. Period. That would be the end of it, and it would be clear. But instead he has decided to play at being democratic."

Henri Massé, the general secretary of the FTQ said "There are all the makings of a good debate in Quebec, and this has been the case since the 1970s. The debate is being conducted in a civilized fashion, the forces present are quite responsible and need no outside help".

Monique Richard, the president of the CEQ, also had this to say "This bill flies in the face of the most basic rules of democracy and our parliamentary system. What entitles the Prime Minister and his Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs to come blindly marching into this debate and tell us what to do and how to do it?"

Daniel Baril of the FEUQ calls for the withdrawal of the bill in the following terms "Mr. Prime Minister, we demand the withdrawal, pure and simple, of your bill and we ask you to come back down to earth with us".

• (1300)

Geneviève Baril puts it as follows "If the Prime Minister wants to give lessons on democracy, let him go back to school and do his homework".

The Montreal Saint-Jean-Baptiste Society says "We will never allow Ottawa to eliminate the right of the people of Quebec to freely decide its future. Canada will lose a few feathers in Quebec, but it will lose more internationally. No one on this earth will ever again listen to a country that promotes rights and freedoms but fails to honour them itself. Canada is violating its international commitments and is turning into a prison of nations. It is time the Prime Minister get out of his village and realize that he is taking an action that is an embarrassment to the whole international community".

As for François Saillant, of the Front d'action populaire en réaménagement urbain, the FRAPRU, he said "The federal government is tarnishing the image of the Canadian people on the international scene by denying the people of Quebec a right as fundamental as the right to self-determination. This is totally unacceptable on the part of a government that has been boasting

for years that we are the best country in the world. The Canadian government is once again showing its hypocrisy when it comes to the respect of fundamental rights".

Jean-Yves Desgagnés, of the Front commun des personnes assistées sociales du Québec, points out the following "The federal bill is an attempt unprecedented in Canadian history to impose on the people of Quebec a legal yoke to prevent it from being the master of its own destiny. Twice, in the 1980 and 1985 referendums, Quebecers were asked to decide on their future. That process was conducted under rules determined by the Quebec national assembly and no one in Quebec, whether on the federalist or the sovereigntist side, challenged the legitimacy and democratic nature of these two consultations. Why question the political maturity of that people and its ability to discuss its future in serenity and in the respect of the various views expressed?"

Mrs. Claude Majeau, of the Fédération des locataires d'habitation à loyer modique du Québec, had this to say "The federal referendum bill is a tactic which may divert the attention of Canadians and Quebecers from a very important issue: the use of the federal government's budgetary surpluses".

All the parties in the national assembly and a great many community groups in Quebec and in Canada are begging the federal government to withdraw Bill C-20. This shows that there is a strong consensus in Quebec.

The government is too afraid of being democratic. It knows that its bill undermines the basic principles of democracy. It knows it will have to withdraw it. So it goes underground. It works behind the scenes, hoping that the legislative committee will make as few waves as possible.

There is an old saw about still waters running deep, but we should also heed what appears on the arch over the door to the opposition lobby. It says in part: "A time will come, which is not yet, when I'll bite him by whom I'm bit."

**Mr. Paul Mercier (Terrebonne—Blainville, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, I have a question for my colleague.

Suppose the national assembly decides to hold a referendum and prepares a question, and the House of Commons likes the question. Now suppose the vote in favour of sovereignty is 52%.

• (1305)

In this very original game where one of the players sets the rules once the game is over, one can expect that, with a 52% yes vote, the federal government would say that a 54% majority is needed. With a 54% yes vote, it would probably say a 56% majority is needed.

In any event, it would not recognize this 52% result. We would therefore find ourselves in a situation where Quebec would be 48%

federalist and 52% sovereignist. Yet it would remain within the federal system, which means that it would be dominated by a minority. This is obviously undemocratic.

I would like to ask my colleague what kind of social peace she thinks we would have in a province that is part of the federation against the will of the majority of its people.

**Mrs. Suzanne Tremblay:** Mr. Speaker, this is probably an extremely interesting question to ask, but the answer could be fraught with consequences.

I have a problem when I hear, for instance, my colleague from Richmond—Arthabaska, and when I note all the questions he asked the minister yesterday in committee, and all the answers he got. We told the government on many occasions that nobody wanted to hear about it. Why also is it that the Prime Minister said “This is a small bill, it will go through fast; nobody is interested in it”. I wonder why, instead of striving for harmony and seeking some kind of agreement, the Liberal government constantly does its best to pour oil on the fire.

When, in committee, it tells our colleagues “We will see, we will decide later; we will work something out”, it leads one to believe that Quebec will never in a million years meet this government’s requirements. As my colleague said, the percentage might not be to its liking. As for the clarity of the question, it look for someone who claims it is not clear. It is telling us that it will consult as long as—it is not written, but we can sense it—it has not found someone saying it is obscure. As our leader said this morning, funny enough, both times, in 1980 and in 1995, Mr. Trudeau and the current Prime Minister respectively told Quebecers “Remember, the question is clear. A yes vote is irreversible”.

So why is what is clear one day obscure the next? This is rather strange. So, this is what is going to happen: it will be obscure one day, and obscure the next, or rather, clear one day, and obscure the next. This government cannot be trusted. As my colleague said, this government has done nothing to save Canada. It gloats it is Canadian, but it does not even know what that means.

[English]

**Mr. Dennis Gruending (Saskatoon—Rosetown—Biggar, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I have heard my hon. colleague talk eloquently about the democratic need for the committee to travel. We in the NDP agree with that, as my hon. colleague from Winnipeg mentioned earlier.

I would be interested in a little more detail as to where the hon. member believes the committee should go and over what period of time. How thorough should these hearings be?

*Supply*

[Translation]

**Mrs. Suzanne Tremblay:** Mr. Speaker, in Quebec we have a very democratic process when it comes to consulting, to parliamentary committees. The rules compel the government to publish advertisements in newspapers saying “A committee has been struck to study such and such a topic. If you want to have an input, register with the committee’s secretary by such and such a date”.

Here in Canada, people are so afraid of democracy that it takes a vote by the government majority to decide who will be called as a witness. Witnesses have to be sponsored by a party, and there is a limit on the number of individuals or groups who can come and testify here.

• (1310)

In view of the significance of the issue for Canada as a whole, as the Prime Minister said, I believe ads should be published in every Canadian newspaper saying that a bill has been introduced, and that there will be hearings in the provinces that have asked the committee to come. It should take the time to consider the bill properly if it is really serious about the future of this country.

**Mr. Odina Desrochers (Lotbinière, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, I welcome the opportunity to participate in today’s historic debate that has already left its mark on my short political career.

I rise today in this Canadian parliament, which has a rich tradition and a strong respect for democracy, to condemn the most undemocratic operation ever organized by the federal Liberals, led by the current prime minister, the last servant of his grand master, Trudeau.

History will show that this man dedicated his whole political career to trampling down the people of Quebec. Today, with his accomplice, another loyal supporter of the Trudeau philosophy, the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, he wants to impose a permanent gag order on the people of Quebec.

Ottawa will now decide on the future of Quebec. The men and women who have been democratically elected to the National Assembly are not capable of doing it. This is a real insult to democracy. Canadian democracy, under the adepts of Trudeau’s philosophy, is sick. It no longer works.

This government is constantly imposing time allocation motions, better known as gag motions, to silence the democratically elected members. This parliament has become a place where undemocratic measures are taken repeatedly.

Last week, when I saw the government House leader get up at second reading stage to move closure again, I told myself that democracy was on its way out.

This closure motion upset me tremendously. I would like to remind members that for about fifteen years, I worked in the

*Supply*

media, where people get to hear the various declarations of the main decision makers in society, a place where people can find out what is going on. Here, in Ottawa, in the House of Commons, they want to gag democracy.

Seeing the Liberals' arrogance, I realized that members of the House no longer have the right to express themselves and take part in important and significant debates on the future of our society.

The gag imposed last week and the rules set by the legislative committee show us that this government no longer wants to listen to the population. The Prime Minister and his Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs do not want to allow Quebecers to express themselves. They have set up a rigid framework, limiting to 45 the number of witnesses to be heard by the committee; 45 people will be heard in Ottawa, and nowhere else. Out of this number, ten witnesses can be selected by the Bloc Québécois.

Moreover, the rules of procedure laid down by the committee endorse the whole undemocratic operation orchestrated by the champion of arrogance in the House, the Prime Minister of Canada.

We are now living here in Ottawa, in the House of Commons, through some dark moments in our current democracy, unfortunately supported by 26 members of parliament from Quebec, 26 members who refuse to see the political consequences of Bill C-20, that constitutional ripoff.

History will be harsh with them, as harsh as it was in 1982, when 74 Liberals unilaterally approved the patriation of the constitution.

• (1315)

In 1984, the Quebec people responded by throwing them out of the Canadian parliament, and the little guy from Shawinigan, the great democrat, resigned in 1986 because he disagreed with the leader of the Liberals at the time, John Turner. Once again, we see what sense of democracy the current Prime Minister has.

I once again appeal to all my federal Liberal colleagues from Quebec. Wake up. Bring the Prime Minister to his senses. Talk to the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs. This is serious. As a member of the Standing Committee on Finance, I had the opportunity to take part in consultations throughout Canada.

As a member of the Standing Committee on Agriculture, I travelled to Australia, Washington, Paris, Chicago and even Brazil. But today, for Bill C-20, we must stay in Ottawa and be bulldozed under by this government, which is ignoring all the demands of Quebecers and Canadians who would have liked to be heard by this committee.

All opposition parties demand that this legislative committee travel across the country and in Quebec. Since this undemocratic bill was introduced, members of my party, the Bloc Québécois,

have spoken out repeatedly in this House and across Quebec to inform people of the political consequences of Bill C-20.

Only yesterday, about 20 of my colleagues travelled throughout Quebec to condemn the approach of the legislative committee of the House of Commons. Back home, in Lotbinière, I have had five interviews with regional media and, during the weekend, a series of events will be held to continue informing and alerting people about the impact of this bill intended to muzzle Quebecers.

Again, on behalf of democracy, on behalf of Quebecers, I ask the Liberal government to allow the committee to expand its consultation process and to travel wherever Canadians want to be heard.

Some 40 years ago, the people of Quebec, the people of the riding of Lotbinière, proud Quebecers, embarked on a long political process that will very soon lead them to Quebec's sovereignty. It will be soon because Bill C-20 will become the necessary political tool to convince Quebecers that the only real way to gain complete freedom of action and to fulfil Quebecers' expectations is sovereignty.

Neither Bill C-20 nor the antidemocratic stubbornness of Liberals in this House will prevent me from continuing this battle, which is so dear to me, to have Quebec's flag at the United Nations and to live in a Quebec free of the federalist yoke once and for all.

**Mr. Mac Harb (Ottawa Centre, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, it is interesting to see our colleague express his emotions while trying to teach a lesson to my colleagues on this side of the House.

However, he forgets that it is the supreme court ruling which stated that the political players will be the ones to determine what is a clear majority in reply to a clear question, depending on the circumstances of any future referendum. This does not go against the bill put forward by the government.

My colleague will recall that, during the last referendum, when one entered the city of Montreal one could see posters showing the Canadian dollar, the "looney", with a Yes beside it. There were other posters with a shovel and a Yes, suggesting that if we voted yes, we would have much more money in our pockets, and yet other posters suggesting that there would be many more jobs.

• (1320)

This was hypocrisy on an international scale. It shows that the question was not clear.

Is my colleague opposed to a clear question without any other hypothesis? Does he agree with that yes or no?

**Mr. Odina Desrochers:** I cannot believe what I am hearing, Mr. Speaker. I think the hon. member is from Ontario. Where is he from?

*Supply*

**An hon. member:** From the nation's capital.

**Mr. Mac Harb:** I am from the nation's capital.

**Mr. Odina Desrochers:** Well, if I am not mistaken, the nation's capital is in Ontario. So, I was right.

**An hon. member:** Close to Montfort.

**Mr. Odina Desrochers:** Is there a split in the nation's capital?

I cannot get over such a diagnostic! For 20 years, I worked in the communications sector. Excuse me but I have never seen such a twit! Do you know what a twit is in Quebec? A twit is someone who does not understand anything, who should go back to school, who needs to learn.

Frankly, if such explanations are supposed to convince us that Bill C-20 will make things clearer, I am worried, very worried indeed.

Concerning the supreme court opinion, people always seem to forget one crucial sentence. It is because of this sentence that we now have Bill C-20. It says that after a winning referendum, you will have to negotiate our becoming a sovereign country. Get that through your head once and for all!

**Mr. Bernard Patry (Pierrefonds—Dollard, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I have a question for the member for Lotbinière.

The hon. member suggests that we take up this issue with the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs. Was the question put to Mr. Facal, Quebec's intergovernmental affairs minister, who said, in November, that the government of Quebec would never comply with the supreme court opinion? This was a call to civil disobedience. Does this mean that the hon. member is for civil disobedience?

I would even go further. If 50% plus one is the democratic limit universally accepted, why is it not mentioned in Quebec's referendum legislation? Why did Mr. Burns, the PQ minister responsible for this legislation in Quebec, say, when introducing this bill, that the "moral weight" of a referendum that would be won based on the clearly and widely expressed will of the people would have to be assessed?

I have a very interesting question for the hon. member. If 50% plus one is the democratic limit universally accepted, does he support the precedent that France created regarding Comoros, the group of islands off Madagascar, when it decided that regions that vote against independence may remain a part of France?

**Mr. Odina Desrochers:** Mr. Speaker, my colleague's question makes so little sense that I would be inclined to think it was written by the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs.

The member is referring to an international context that has nothing to do with our own context. He is trying once again to engage in demagoguery with regard to the Quebec minister of intergovernmental affairs. Since we came back here in the fall, the federal Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs has repeatedly shown his arrogance by ignoring all of Quebec's demands. In that context, I have nothing to learn from these people.

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. McClelland):** Resuming debate. I know that the hon. member for Châteauguay would like to ask questions, but I promise that as soon as there is an opportunity to do so I will give him the floor.

[English]

**Mr. Lynn Myers (Waterloo—Wellington, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, this is indeed an important debate, one in which Canadians take a great deal of interest, and rightfully so. We are talking about the very country in which we exist. I believe it is important that all members of the House have the opportunity to debate a matter such as this. I am very pleased to be a part of this great and historic debate.

• (1325)

The member for Rimouski—Mitis talked about the Prime Minister having to go back to school to do his homework. I also heard somewhat of a lecture from the hon. member for Lotbinière, who seemed to indicate to the hon. member for Ottawa Centre that he too should go back to school.

That kind of arrogance and condescension really is inappropriate in the House. The hon. member opposite claims to be a communications expert. It seems to me that he should listen to his constituents, to the people of Quebec, and indeed to all Canadians. People do not want to go down this path, no matter where they live in this great country of ours. They want to talk about jobs. They want to talk about taxation levels. They want to talk about health. They want to talk about education. They do not want to talk about another referendum. They do not want to talk about the breakup of this great country. Quite frankly, we have better things to talk about.

The motion before us today is really quite frivolous. I certainly oppose it, and I would urge all members of the House to do likewise.

The Bloc has moved that the House legislative committee considering Bill C-20 hold hearings in all regions across the country. I ask, to what purpose? Why would we do that?

My colleagues and I understand the importance of this bill. I think everyone in Canada does. We understand the importance of consulting Canadians. However, I and others draw the line at insisting that the House committee cross this land to obtain input.

*Supply*

The committee can and will hear ample witnesses without having to travel. It is open to the public and we will hear a number of witnesses, all of whom will be invited, without any holdback, to attend. It is televised to Quebecers and to all Canadians. Through the television they can watch the deliberations of the committee.

The committee has decided in its own right to remain in Ottawa. This type of decision is its prerogative and I certainly respect that, as do other members of the House. I am confident that the committee will be able to fulfill its mandate and satisfy Canadians that it is an accessible and democratic process, one that is in place and one that will serve Canada well.

I can say, for example, as chairman of the health committee, that we deal with issues all the time of grave and great importance to Canadians, no matter where they live. We do not travel. We have other ways of doing it, in the sense of, through other mechanisms, allowing witnesses to come here and still have their say and input without having to go to that expense.

I remind the House that the committee examining the province of Quebec's Bill 99 is not travelling through Quebec. When the Quebec national assembly examined the Calgary declaration, Mr. Jacques Brassard, the Quebec Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs and Deputy Leader, said the issue was of primary concern for all Quebecers, but that committee did not travel either.

We hear one thing from the Bloc, but we hear quite another thing from the Government of Quebec. It is not always clear in terms of what the Bloc wants and how it wants to go about things.

Mr. Speaker, I will be sharing my time with the hon. member for Beauce.

Let me be clear that under Quebec's referendum law, when the national assembly examines a referendum question, it does not even have to refer the question to committee, let alone a travelling committee. Imagine that. It does not even have to refer the question to a committee. It does not even have to hear technical witnesses. It can debate the question and after 35 hours—a measly 35 hours—adopt it without listening to any public input whatsoever.

Why has the Bloc put forward this motion to have our committee travel? It does not strike me as being vital to the functioning of the committee examining Bill C-20. It is simply another example of the Bloc twisting and turning for its own purposes. Those purposes, I say, are twisted.

• (1330)

The committee has been tasked with studying the clarity act which the government holds as important and urgent. I believe that all Canadians do as well.

Bill C-20 follows the opinion of the supreme court. As political actors, the House of Commons and the Government of Canada have a duty to make their views known on how they should assess the circumstances of clarity that would trigger an obligation for the Government of Canada to negotiate secession.

In a recent press release from the Prime Minister's office it is important to note that the government indicated:

Insisting on clarity is about respecting the rights of Quebecers to make an informed choice. It is about respecting democracy. Those who choose to obstruct the democratic system with cynical delaying tactics to prevent a real debate should be held accountable for their own anti-democratic actions.

This is what the Bloc has been doing all along. It is not on this side of the House that it is undemocratic, it is on that side of the House. They are the anti-democrats. What we are seeing today is the proof and the proof justly shown. We on the government side will have no part of it and neither will Canadians. Bloc members are the ones accusing us of undermining the principles of democracy by tabling the bill in the House. Imagine. What nonsense.

On the contrary, the bill is about democracy. It reflects our democratic heritage by ensuring that Canadians would be asked a difficult yet clear question and that they would fully understand the consequences.

One of the criticisms directed against us in the House relates to the 50% plus one rule to define a majority which the Bloc members consider ironclad. We all know that it is an internationally recognized principle of democracy that 50% plus one does not always suffice. It is not difficult to understand that under some circumstances a majority of this amplitude is simply not enough. Would it justify so grave an action as breaking up a country such as ours? I do not think so.

A Reform member opposite caterwauls while this huge and historic debate is going on, asking what is the number. I would point out that in my view those Reformers opposite are every bit as much separatists as those other people opposite. It is unbelievable how they flip-flop on such an important issue. They have flip-flopped repeatedly when it comes to Canada.

I would ask the Reform member opposite and all his colleagues sitting in the House, why is it that the Reform Party does not stand up for Canada? Why is it that the Reform Party always wants to break things apart, pit society against society, people against people, region against region, province against province? Why is it that they are always intent on doing that? I do not know. What I do know is that Canadians reject that kind of nonsense and rightfully so.

The simple majority touted by the Bloc is not by any means absolute. How can we be criticized for opposing a simplistic vision of democracy which holds that a simple majority is sufficient to take such a serious and irreversible step? The rule of 50% plus one

*Supply*

cannot apply when it comes to amending a province's political and legal status. This is only common sense and Canadians understand that. Canadians understand common sense.

We have tabled the bill because we believe that democracy is more than mere arithmetic, unlike the Reform Party and unlike the Bloc. They have always been close allies. Even at their own convention Reformers had Monsieur Biron, a separatist, as the lead speaker. Imagine, a separatist speaking at the convention for the Reform Party. Does that not tell Canadians a great deal about who those Reformers are and what they stand for?

We have tabled the bill because we believe in democracy. We believe it is important. It is a protection of rights. It is one of the four principles the Supreme Court of Canada said we must consider if ever we have to tackle the important issue of secession.

• (1335)

I want to be crystal clear. The Bloc's objective is not to have the committee travel but to destroy Bill C-20 by unreasonable delays. That is unacceptable. We on this side of the House will simply not allow it.

Let us defeat this motion. Let us expose it for what it is. Let us get on with the business of the House. That is what all Canadians want us to do.

**Mr. Rick Casson (Lethbridge, Ref.):** Mr. Speaker, we have listened to a lot of things in the House. What we just listened to was at the bottom of the list as far as intelligence or having any meaning or relevance in Canada.

I could not sit here and let the gentleman across the way call me a separatist because I am not. I will do whatever I can to work hard to keep this country together.

The motion we are debating today is about opening up the debate and allowing Canadians to have input. I would like the member to explain why he feels that Canadians from coast to coast to coast should not have input into this clarity bill, a bill that has a potential to divide the country. All Canadians have an interest in this. All Canadians have a right to come forward and to speak. I would like him to clarify the government's position on not doing that.

**Mr. Lynn Myers:** Mr. Speaker, it is always interesting to hear what the Reform Party has to say and how it says it. Canadians see through its kind of tone and extremism.

I think back to before Christmas. All members know that the Nisga'a treaty was a huge and very important treaty. When the clarity bill which we are talking about today and that historic Nisga'a treaty came before the House, where was the Leader of the Opposition? He was in Mexico. We are dealing with these all important issues and where is the Leader of Her Majesty's Loyal Opposition? He is not in the House. I assume he is still getting taxpayers' money to be here.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Benoît Sauvageau (Repentigny, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, I believe you forgot to tell him he is not allowed to mention who is not in the House. It must be an honest oversight. I mentioned who was present, not who was absent since that is not allowed.

My hon. colleague, who is a stalwart and, I must say, very convincing Liberal, must recall the time when, in 1980, at the Paul Sauvé Centre, Pierre Elliott Trudeau very eloquently stated "Trust me, ladies and gentlemen, the question is clear. If you vote yes, you will leave Canada".

Fifteen years later, in the riding of Verdun, Jean Chrétien said "Ladies and gentlemen, the choice before you is gut wrenching. The question is clear. If you vote yes, you will leave Canada". By the way, they both made promises they did not keep. I am anticipating the answer. They both promised renewal, and neither delivered.

My point is that both said the question was clear. In 1995, 94% of Quebecers voted on a question the Prime Minister had determined to be clear. Why is the hon. member suggesting today that it was not, contrary—incidentally—to what his leader, his Prime Minister and his own party said?

Second, as my Conservative colleague from Richmond—Arthabaska mentioned earlier, is it going to take a majority of 50% plus one in the House to determine if the question is clear? This is another question.

Third, who can tell us what the numbers will be? Earlier he told the Reform member that, if you inquire about the numbers, it means you are a separatist. But if one inquires about the numbers when dealing with a clarity bill, it might be that one wants to be perfectly clear. What are the numbers according to him?

[*English*]

**Mr. Lynn Myers:** Mr. Speaker, the hon. member talks about my historic memory. I would appeal to his historic memory. I would appeal to him to reread the questions of 1980 and 1995. I will not bore the House by doing it here but I can say that they went on and on and on. They were not clear; they twisted and turned with all kinds of nuances. That will not happen again.

• (1340)

We as the government on this side of the House will ensure that we will keep whatever promises we made in terms of including all Canadians. We will also continue to provide the peace, order and good government required by all Canadians. That is not to twist into this kind of nonsensical equation. Rather we will make sure that we provide jobs for Canadians. We will make sure that we have our fiscal house in order. We will make sure that we provide the kind of government, health care and all the things that Canadians want.

*Supply*

As far as the numbers are concerned, the supreme court was very clear. Even Mr. Bouchard said that the supreme court's judgment had merit. The supreme court said it will be a clear question and a clear majority. That is good enough for me. It is democratic and it is what Canadians want.

[Translation]

**Mr. Claude Drouin (Beauce, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, first, I want to say that I am opposed to the motion introduced by the leader of the Bloc Québécois because it is not designed to broaden or advance the debate on the clarity bill. On the contrary, it is part of the Bloc Québécois' strategy on this bill, which is more or less respectful of democracy.

The Bloc's motion before us today would have the House "instruct", and I stress the word "instruct", the legislative committee on Bill C-20 to hold public hearings in all regions of the country.

All of us in the House who sit on various committees are well aware of the standing orders of the House governing committees. We all know that the committees of the House can establish their own rules and restrictions, as long as they do not exceed the basic powers granted to them by the House.

We, on the legislative committee on Bill C-20, have availed ourselves of that prerogative and decided, by ballot, that the committee would sit only in Ottawa. We have also taken steps to ensure that a wide range of witnesses are heard and that committee hearings are broadcast so that the people interested in the clarity bill can watch the debate.

So far, the legislative committee on Bill C-20 has acted in accordance with the standing orders, but our colleagues from the Bloc would now have the House give orders to this committee.

Now, do I have to remind this House that our colleagues from the Bloc, after having tried everything they could to prevent the introduction of this bill, after having delayed and disrupted the second reading debate, tabled, on February 10, a motion that this House decline to give second reading to this bill.

So much for the respect our colleagues have for the legislative process which aims, as we all know, to allow open debates on bills.

All members of this House know that the Bloc resorts to these tactics and strategies because its members are opposed to this bill which they consider antidemocratic. I would like to use the time I have to go over a few basic notions of democracy and say a few words about how democracy is perceived by the members of the Bloc and their independentist mentors.

There is nothing like a definition to put things in their true perspective. Here are some simple definitions found in dictio-

naries. A democracy is "a country where the people choose their government by voting for it." Also "a government in which the people hold the ruling power either directly or through elected representatives; rule by the ruled."

As our colleague, the Minister for Intergovernmental Affairs, said in a speech before students of the University of Montreal law school, and I quote:

The history of Canadian democracy, despite its failures and dark chapters, can be put up against democracy in any other countries.

He also quoted what an historian of the University of Edinburgh said on the 150th anniversary of the responsible government in Canada:

With regards to the crucial combination of grassroots participation, human rights and self-government, the history of Canada is unequalled in the world.

• (1345)

Democracy does not boil down to simple mathematics or to a simple majority in a vote.

In the introduction of its opinion on the reference concerning the secession of Quebec, the Supreme Court of Canada warns against that danger:

Democracy is a fundamental value in our constitutional law and political culture. While it has both an institutional and an individual aspect, the democratic principle was also argued before us in the sense of the supremacy of the sovereign will of a people. . . Democracy is commonly understood as being a political system of majority rule. It is essential to be clear what this means. It would be a grave mistake to equate legitimacy with the "sovereign will" or majority rule alone, to the exclusion of other constitutional values.

In the January 29 issue of the prestigious magazine *The Economist* there was an editorial describing what could constitute secession rules and dealing namely with the majority issue in light of the underlying challenges posed by the secession project. After defining one of the problems at the very heart of any secession project, the author asked about those who are left behind and those who are dragged along against their will. He declared that any secession should be made only if a clear majority—of a lot more than 50% plus one—opted for it freely.

After reading that article, will the proponents of separation speak out against the editorial staff of *The Economist*? Probably not. They know all too well that this 50% plus one rule, which they say is sacred, is arbitrary, as evidenced by the fact that, on November 24, 1996, the day after a vote of confidence in the leader of the Parti Québécois and current Premier of Quebec, a headline in *La Presse* read "Bouchard shaken up after finding out he does not have the confidence of one delegate out of four". The article said this:

Behind the scenes, it was mentioned that Mr. Bouchard, who was expecting a lot more support, was stunned when he heard the results in the presence of his closest advisers. Strategists had set the psychological threshold at 80%, assuming Mr. Bouchard would clearly get more.

*Supply*

The vice premier and finance minister of Quebec said, and again I quote from *La Presse* “Like him, we are stunned; we would have liked to get a lot more support”. Nobody said that Mr. Bouchard’s attitude was undemocratic. Nobody said that. Everybody understood he wanted a clear mandate.

If, for our opponents, wanting to clarify something through legislation within the rules of our democratically established institutions is a breach of democracy, members will agree that we ourselves could easily question their good faith as democrats. Our opponents are pulling their holier-than-thou routine. Are they really above reproach as far as behaving as true democrats?

Philippe Séguin, the former president of the French national assembly, found it appropriate recently to point out that one must accept the result of a referendum even though it is different from what one expected.

On February 1, during an interview he gave on Radio-Canada’s *Téléjournal*, he said:

—I was an opponent. . . of the Maastricht treaty. . . I know one cannot hold referendums on the same issues within a relatively short timeframe. I am an expert on lost referendums and I know that if today, eight years after Maastricht, I was to ask for another vote on Maastricht, my fellow countrymen would find it odd.

This person, who until very recently was a friend and ally of Jacques Parizeau, simply recognizes that, in democracy, once the people has expressed its will, one must accept the result.

Once voters have expressed their will, a political party must not try again and again to obtain a result that would be favourable to its position, hoping to wear voters down.

• (1350)

As far as the infamous rules governing referendums on secession to which the secessionist leaders are constantly referring to are concerned, we are being accused of doing a flip-flop and of suddenly refusing to abide by these rules for the wording of the question and the majority. However, it takes two to tango. We were never consulted when these rules were established and, moreover, contrary to some reports, we never accepted them complacently, as if they were untouchable principles which absolutely could not be questioned.

I wish to remind the House that before the 1980 referendum, the Prime Minister of Canada had very clearly said that if somebody knocked on the door of sovereignty association, there would be no answer.

What can be said of the leaders’ refusal to recognise a role for the members representing the people they would leave behind and the others that they would drag along with them against their will? Refusing the right to speak in their name to the members of this House is, members will agree, a serious breach of democracy.

Accordingly, members will understand my refusal to support this motion which basically is only another example of the great liberties that our colleagues from the Bloc are taking with democracy. My refusal is even more categorical due to the fact that these same colleagues are trying to us how democracy should operate.

**Mr. Ghislain Lebel (Chambly, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, I listened with interest to the speech by the hon. member for Beauce, who paid a lot of attention to the opinion of the supreme court. He said “The supreme court said this, the supreme court said that, the supreme court thought that—”

The supreme court is their court. The court whose judges they appoint. My colleague who just spoke probably does not know this, but before 1949, when there was a dispute, particularly a constitutional dispute, things were referred to the privy council in London. It was a neutral arbitrator that could rule on disputes of this nature.

I also say so for the benefit of the member sitting to the right of the member for Beauce, because I am sure that she does not know it either. These references to the privy council in London were prohibited in 1949. Does my honorable colleague know that out of the nine judges sitting on the supreme court, three come from Quebec? These are usually not the type of people who would have sovereignist leanings or who would even be able to understand what the sovereignists are asking for.

It is a bit like a divorce case, where the wife would say “In our dispute, the arbitrator will be my mother”. The verdict is easy to predict.

Does the member who keeps talking about the supreme court not recognize that it is acting a bit in this way? I would like to say something, but I will not say it here because it would not be polite. I also have a mother and she would be offended. I would rather let him answer on the subject of his beloved supreme court.

**Mr. Claude Drouin:** Mr. Speaker, I appreciate this question, because it gives me the opportunity to quote a certain statement to the House “I have practiced law for 20 years and I can testify that justice in Canada is in good hands, that we have judges who are responsible and at all times aware of their obligations”. This was said in the House on September 1, 1988 by Quebec’s premier himself, Lucien Bouchard, who was then the leader of the opposition.

He added “I am for the rule of law, and it should always be respected”. Put that in your pipe.

**Mr. Jean-Guy Chrétien (Frontenac—Mégantic, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, the riding of Beauce is next to mine, and I know the people from Beauce very well.

*S. O. 31*

I think that, today, all the people in that riding must be quite disappointed with their member.

**Some hon. members:** Hear, hear.

**Mr. Jean-Guy Chrétien:** Speaking about democracy, in the last election in Quebec, in 1995, the riding of Beauce-Sud elected Mr. Quirion with a majority of 68 votes. In the riding of Beauce-Nord, Normand Poulin was elected with a majority of about 100 votes.

• (1355)

These are not overwhelming majorities, but it was democratic. We had judicial recounts and all citizens in Beauce accepted the verdict, even with such narrow victories.

I have two questions for the hon. member for Beauce. If Bill C-20 is so clear, why is he refusing to travel with the committee to his riding? That is what all his constituents want. Why is he refusing?

In Bill C-20, the majority is not indicated anywhere. From his seat in the House, can he tell us whether the majority will be 79%, 59% or 50% plus one? If he has any idea, let him tell us. If not, he should not say a word. But he should tell his constituents that he has no idea.

**Mr. Claude Drouin:** Mr. Speaker, in my opinion, it is deplorable that the president of Frontenac—Mégantic should try to think for the people of Beauce. They are quite capable of expressing themselves. Moreover, they did so in the last election, in 1997, by electing me.

**Mr. Jean-Guy Chrétien:** Mr. Speaker, on a point of order. The member was elected in 1997, like most of us. He should know that we are here as members of parliament, not as association presidents.

**The Speaker:** I will give the member 30 seconds to answer.

**Mr. Claude Drouin:** Mr. Speaker, I am sorry if I have been disrespectful to you.

The hon. member for Frontenac—Mégantic mentioned there was an election where the member for Beauce-Sud won with a majority of 68% and the other with a majority of 61%.

I think he has a selective memory, because he forgot to mention that the member for Beauce-Sud who replaced the late Paul-Eugène Quirion, the member for Beauce-Sud, was elected in the next to last election with a majority of 5,000 votes and was elected in the last one with a majority of 3,500 votes, that the member for Beauce-Nord was elected with a majority of 2,000 votes, whereas I myself was elected with a majority of 10,000 votes, something I am very proud of.

The people of Beauce are very proud to be Canadians, Quebecers and inhabitants of Beauce.

**STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS**

[English]

**HEALTH**

**Mr. Ovid L. Jackson (Bruce—Grey, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, our system of public health was created by Canadians who believed that all citizens deserve equal access to high quality medical care regardless of where they live in this great country. Canadians I have spoken to are proud of this accomplishment.

Today our health care system is under stress. Both service demand and costs are rising while hospitals and medical personnel are attempting to stretch their budgets to new limits. Clearly the realities of health care have changed over the last 30 years. While we know more about illness prevention, we continue to depend on technology and drugs to cure ailments that might be addressed at a lower cost with equal success.

It is time to engage in open, inclusive debate to address the challenges of our health care system. I believe we can continue to provide Canadians with the care they deserve by renewing our health care system and addressing today's realities.

\* \* \*

**CORRECTIONAL SERVICE CANADA**

**Mr. Myron Thompson (Wild Rose, Ref.):** Mr. Speaker, during the year 2000 it will be my personal mandate to educate the solicitor general on the nefarious activities of the Commissioner of Correctional Service Canada.

The first lesson is an easy one. Guards need weapons and inmates should not be served filet mignon. They are there to be punished. The more serious lesson today involves the commissioner's 50:50 plan. This policy is to reduce the inmate population by 50% regardless of the risk.

Both the commissioner and the solicitor general will deny this policy exists. However, in my possession I have a letter from the warden of the Grande Cache institute congratulating his staff for releasing 2,004 convicted offenders back into our community and therefore exceeding the commissioner's goal of 2,000.

Tonight's homework for the solicitor general will be to read this memo I have forwarded to his office and educate himself on what this bungling bureaucrat is really up to. My only hope is that the solicitor general will terminate the commissioner before my next lesson.

• (1400)

### FLAG DAY 2000

**Mr. Hec Clouthier (Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, this week I was pleased and privileged to be with over 300 students at our Lady of Fatima School in Renfrew to celebrate a defining moment in the history of our great country, the 35th anniversary of the unveiling of our Canadian flag.

Organized by teacher Earl Bennett, the outdoor rally on a bright, beautiful winter morning was symbolic of all that Canadians hold near and dear to their hearts. We paid tribute to a shining, scintillating symbol that is recognized throughout the world as an icon for peace, prosperity, hope and tolerance.

The theme for Flag Day 2000 was “Take pride in Canada. The place to be in the 21st Century”.

When I looked out at these eager young students, I saw the future of our country Canada. Rest assured, Mr. Speaker and colleagues, that the next generation of Canadians will dare to dream. They will reach for the stars and they will build an even better country for each and every one of us as we march into the next millennium.

\* \* \*

[Translation]

### STUDENT SUMMER EMPLOYMENT

**Mr. Raymond Lavigne (Verdun—Saint-Henri, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, this is the time of year when students across Canada are thinking about finding summer employment.

The Canadian government is there to give them a hand with this, thanks to its Student Summer Job Action program.

The program offers the opportunity for secondary school, college and university students to acquire valuable experience during their holidays. The program has two objectives: to encourage employers to hire a student and to help students launch their own projects.

We wish all students who are seeking summer employment the best of luck. I would invite all individuals, companies and students in my beautiful riding of Verdun—Saint-Henri to take advantage of this project. Is our Canada not a fine country?

\* \* \*

### STOCKHOLM INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE

**Mr. Irwin Cotler (Mount Royal, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I wish to share with my colleagues the concerns and aspirations that were expressed at the recent international conference on the Holocaust, held in Stockholm.

*S. O. 31*

[English]

First, the dangers of racist hate speech, which in Bosnia and Rwanda took us down the road to ethnic cleansing and genocide. As the Supreme Court of Canada put it in upholding the constitutionality of anti-hate legislation, “The Holocaust did not begin in the gas chambers, it began with words”.

Second, the danger of remaining silent, of indifference to evil, be it the killing fields of Sierra Leone, Chechnya or Burundi, “Dans ce temps-ci, qui s’excuse, s’accuse”.

Third, the importance, as Sweden has demonstrated, of Holocaust and human rights education as an antidote to racism, xenophobia and hate.

Fourth, the struggle against impunity; of fidelity to the Nuremberg legacy of bringing war criminals to justice.

Finally, the inspiration of a Raoul Wallenberg, the Swedish non-Jew who saved 100,000 Jews in the Holocaust, who showed that one person can make a difference, that each one of us in our daily lives can make the world a better place.

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### GOVERNMENT GRANTS

**Mr. Inky Mark (Dauphin—Swan River, Ref.):** Mr. Speaker, this government needs to add a new page for its famous binder boy. This page should be entitled “Accountability”.

**The Speaker:** Order, please. I would prefer that we address each other by our titles rather than give each other nicknames.

**Mr. Inky Mark:** Mr. Speaker, the government needs to add a new page. This page should be entitled “Accountability”. Not only do we see the lack of accountability in Human Resources Development with the transitional jobs fund, but it appears more six point plans are required in departments like heritage.

The heritage minister, through the Canada Council, signs off on hundreds of millions of dollars worth of grants with little scrutiny or follow-up.

The auditor general should look into it: for example, \$34,000 for an artist to reflect and develop his thoughts, \$34,000 for an artist to work 18 months without the usual financial strain.

Farmers in my riding are asking for disaster relief. They are going broke. Yet the government finds \$15,000 for year two of the continuous garbage project.

Canadian taxpayers have a simple question: Whose accountable in the government and where will the buck stop?

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## ACADEMY OF MOTION PICTURE ARTS AND SCIENCES

**Mr. Rick Limoges (Windsor—St. Clair, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, allow me to congratulate all of the Canadians nominated this year by the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences.

Two films by the National Film Board of Canada were nominated for an Oscar in the short film, animated category. They are: *When the Day Breaks*, directed by Wendy Tilby and Amanda Forbis and produced by David Verrall; and *My Grandmother Ironed the King's Shirts*, directed by Torill Kove and produced by Marcy Page of the National Film Board and Lars Tommerbakke of Studio Magika in Norway.

• (1405)

Congratulations to the National Film Board for its 64th and 65th Oscar nominations.

Two other films in the same category have Canadian connections: *The Old Man and the Sea*, a Canada-Russia-Japan co-production, an IMAX animated film produced by La Maison de production Pascal Blais of Montreal; and *3 Misses*, directed by Paul Driessen also of Montreal.

*The Red Violin*, a Canada-Italy co-production that has received many awards in Canada and internationally, was also nominated for the work of composer John Corigliano for best original score.

\* \* \*

## THE ECONOMY

**Mr. Mac Harb (Ottawa Centre, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, Canadians have confidence in the economy and the future. This good news is directly related to the Liberal government's skilful management of social and economic demands.

There are many indicators that reinforce this positive attitude. For example, housing sales have reached record levels in many communities. According to the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation, new housing starts rose another 3% over the last year.

The news does not end here. The Canada gross domestic product is expected to grow by 4% in 2000. Also, the help-wanted index has steadily risen over the last three years and this trend continues to grow. Even factory shipments were up 9.3% at the end of 1999.

The numbers say it all. Canadians are confident in their economy and they are confident in their government. I am positive that the Minister of Finance's upcoming budget will result in even greater economic confidence for Canadians.

## HEALTH CARE

**Mr. Grant McNally (Dewdney—Alouette, Ref.):** Mr. Speaker, the Liberal government is responsible for the crisis in our health care system. It has cut over \$10 billion in health transfer payments to the provinces and now fund less than 20% of medicare costs, a far cry from its 50:50 cost sharing promise.

In my home town of Mission, B.C., severe service cuts are being proposed at the Mission Memorial Hospital. Over 1,300 people recently attended a public forum to share their concerns about these proposed cuts. In addition, my office has received hundreds of letters and phone calls urging me to bring this issue to the attention of the Minister of Health.

The people of Mission are fearful that they may lose core health care services in their community. This is a fear that my constituents and all Canadians should not have to live with.

I want to tell the Minister of Health that his slash and burn approach to health care funding hurts real Canadians.

My constituents want the government to take immediate action to ensure that small towns like Mission can maintain adequate facilities to care for their communities.

\* \* \*

[Translation]

## SNOW SCULPTURE

**Mrs. Pauline Picard (Drummond, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, "Mon pays ce n'est pas un pays, c'est l'hiver", sang Gilles Vigneault. Last week, the Quebec team proved it once again by winning the third snow sculpture competition here on Parliament Hill.

Normand and Martine Rousseau, of Notre-Dame-du-Bon-Conseil, and Camilien Belhumeur, the mayor of St-Guillemme, took first place with a magnificent sculpture of the "Rocket", Maurice Richard, a hero to Quebecers and the ideal person to illustrate the passion of our people.

This trio from the Drummondville area is not savouring its first success. Martine and Normand Rousseau have just won for the second consecutive year the international snow sculpture competition at the Quebec City carnival. Camilien Belhumeur has participated three times in the Parliament Hill competition, coming second in 1998.

On behalf of the people in the riding of Drummond, I would like to pay tribute to the members of the Quebec team, past masters at their art.

Mr. Belhumeur and Mr. and Mrs. Rousseau, we are proud of you.

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[English]

**HUMAN RESOURCES DEVELOPMENT**

**Mr. Bill Graham (Toronto Centre—Rosedale, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, today I share with the House the contents of a letter to the editor of the *Globe and Mail* sent by the executive director of Dixon Hall, an important social agency in my riding located near Regent Park, the first social housing complex built in Canada. Still today, a very fragile social environment.

Mr. MacDougall's letter challenges an editorial about HRDC which suggests that they are lining up at the trough for easy money and recommends that the fund be closed. It describes the much needed projects that this funding supports for women, for homeless individuals, and projects that train people for jobs and work in carpentry, child care, baking and small business development.

"For this money" he says, "we write extensive applications, sign contracts and report monthly to HRDC—The deep impact of HRDC funding cannot be so callously dismissed".

Every week I visit worthwhile projects funded by HRDC in my riding. I want the House to know that the funding that HRDC delivers to my riding is well spent and is having a real effect on the lives of vulnerable Canadians.

\* \* \*

● (1410)

**CREDIT UNIONS**

**Mr. John Solomon (Regina—Lumsden—Lake Centre, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, more and more Canadians are fed up with their banks and are switching to credit unions. Now the credit union movement is taking over rural bank branches deserted by the Bank of Montreal.

Can a bank change? Apparently not. Can credit unions save the day? I am pleased to say that they have been able to save 63 jobs in rural communities across Saskatchewan by buying up 17 branches that the Bank of Montreal wanted to close, plus 17 more branches saving 53 jobs in the province of Alberta. Former customers of the Bank of Montreal in both provinces will be able to continue doing business with a financial institution in their rural communities.

I salute the important role played by co-ops and credit unions as one of the three vital engines of the economy in our country. As the vehicle of their members, rather than their shareholders, co-ops and credit unions prove every day that people can run a successful business by serving their customers instead of milking them dry.

I congratulate the credit union movement for saving jobs and financial services in rural Canada and helping to revitalize the rural way of life. Well done.

[Translation]

**BILL C-20**

**Mrs. Pierrette Venne (Saint-Bruno—Saint-Hubert, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, exceptionally, the Prime Minister has told us the whole raw truth: Bill C-20 is a "petty" bill. He did not think he was expressing it so well, since the sense of it can readily be extended to apply to the general attitude of the Liberals in this matter.

Tabling the bill just before Christmas, imposing closure in the House of Commons to prevent those opposed from speaking out; preventing the legislative committee from travelling or even from extending its deliberations in order to hear more witnesses: there are not a lot of great democrats on the other side of the House.

The federal Liberals from Quebec, far from defending democratic values, would be prepared to give the rest of Canada a veto on the people of Quebec's desire for change. There are indeed not a lot of great defenders of Quebec on the other side of the House.

Yes, Bill C-20 is a "petty" bill, another Liberal attempt to shrink Quebec and deny the existence of its people. What else could we expect from a "petty" government?

\* \* \*

[English]

**THE LATE ANGUS MACLEAN**

**Mrs. Elsie Wayne (Saint John, PC):** Mr. Speaker, this week Canadians mourn the loss of a true Canadian hero and a man of the people. Former Diefenbaker cabinet minister and P.E.I. premier, Angus MacLean, passed away Tuesday at the age 85.

In World War II, Mr. MacLean was shot down over the Nazi occupied Netherlands and managed, through his keen and resourceful intelligence, to survive for 72 days on the run in Holland.

This rural P.E.I. farmer and decorated airman decided to enter politics in Canada in 1951. He made his way to Ottawa to represent islanders with decency, loyalty and steadiness but without pretensions. For the following 25 years, Mr. MacLean became the most elected islander in P.E.I. history.

In the mid-1970s, Mr. MacLean decided to return home to P.E.I. to his farm. But, he still had politics flowing in his veins. He went on to win the leadership of the provincial Tory Party and brought the his party to government in 1979.

Angus MacLean was a true Canadian hero in war and a true Canadian patriot in his public service.

*Oral Questions***NORTHERN SCIENTIFIC TRAINING PROGRAM**

**Mr. Peter Adams (Peterborough, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, the Northern Scientific Training Program, NSTP, has helped students study in Canada's north for more than 30 years. Each year the NSTP supports hundreds of students in valuable research projects and learning and living projects.

However, the NSTP has been cut back to a shadow of its former self. Today, when research in the north is more important than ever before and when the importance of young Canadians gaining life experience in remote parts of Canada is especially important, the NSTP is at its lowest level in decades.

I urge the government and the minister to restore funding to this unique and important national program. Let us help our young people help Canada's north.

\* \* \*

**FISHERIES AND OCEANS**

**Mr. Mark Muise (West Nova, PC):** Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans is quite fortunate that the Atlantic fisheries crisis is being overshadowed by the troubles in HRDC.

The fisheries crisis may be out of the limelight, but I can assure the House that a serious problem still exists. I am telling the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans, no. I am warning him that violence could once again erupt if solutions are not soon found to the problems.

We are hearing through the grapevine that the government is seriously looking for some kind of buyback program where it will purchase boats, licences and gear to help integrate natives into the commercial fishery.

I would strongly suggest to the minister that any such solution must somehow involve the elimination of the food fishery; otherwise, these resources may be used during the summer months to help non-status Indians to conduct their own fishery. If this should occur, we can surely expect serious unrest.

I can only hope that the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans will take these concerns seriously before finalizing any agreement in this dispute.

\* \* \*

• (1415)

**AMATEUR SPORT**

**Mr. Alex Shepherd (Durham, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, Canadians interested in sports have suffered the setbacks of watching some of their own athletes accused of taking illicit drugs. That is why I am

pleased to acknowledge the hosting in Montreal by the hon. Secretary of State for Amateur Sport of the Montreal workshop on anti-doping in sports.

In this workshop commenced yesterday Canada is playing host to over 30 international governmental delegations in a meeting to advance the role of governments in the fight against doping in sports.

It is a great distinction for Canada to play host to such a prestigious event in the field of amateur sport. It speaks volumes about the government's commitment to enhancing Canada's amateur sport both here and worldwide.

**ORAL QUESTION PERIOD**

[English]

**HUMAN RESOURCES DEVELOPMENT**

**Miss Deborah Grey (Edmonton North, Ref.):** Mr. Speaker, in order to qualify for Canada jobs fund grants a riding must have an unemployment rate of greater than 10% according to 1997 figures.

This past November 1, 1999, the HRD minister approved two CJF grants totalling \$640,000 in her very own riding. Will the minister confirm these facts?

**Hon. Jane Stewart (Minister of Human Resources Development, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, what I will confirm is that when I became Minister of Human Resources Development Canada I delegated the authority for approvals in my riding to my deputy minister.

**Miss Deborah Grey (Edmonton North, Ref.):** Mr. Speaker, the minister knows that the Canada jobs fund requires a 1997 unemployment rate of 10% for any given riding to qualify.

In 1997 the riding of Brant did not exceed that 10% threshold, no matter the deputy minister or who would give approval to that. By what authority did the minister authorize these grants?

**Hon. Jane Stewart (Minister of Human Resources Development, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, first, as I mentioned, I did not authorize them because I delegated the authority for decisions in my riding to the deputy minister. Second, the employment region in which my riding falls was 10.3%.

**Miss Deborah Grey (Edmonton North, Ref.):** Mr. Speaker, that is not true. The average rate for unemployment in 1997 in the riding of Brant, the category and the criteria for which the Canada jobs fund looks at, was in fact 8.4%, by her own documents.

One cannot delegate authority for these things. She is the MP. She is the minister. I do not think one can just delegate to the deputy minister.

Since she ultimately approved grants to her own riding in spite of the fact that it clearly did not qualify, can she tell us what constitutes an illegal grant?

**Hon. Jane Stewart (Minister of Human Resources Development, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, we did qualify. In fact the investments are making a difference in the opportunities available to the people in my riding.

I stand in my place and I am very grateful, as are the people in my riding, for the opportunities that the Government of Canada has presented to them as individuals and to our community as a whole.

**Mr. Monte Solberg (Medicine Hat, Ref.):** Mr. Speaker, the terms and conditions of the Canada jobs fund are very specific. They say the rules can only be amended with the approval of treasury board. Clearly, the 8.4% unemployment rate in the minister's riding did not meet the guidelines to receive \$640,000 in CJF grants that she herself approved on November 1.

Can the minister tell us and will she produce the authorization from treasury board that gave her the authority to break those rules?

**Hon. Jane Stewart (Minister of Human Resources Development, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, no rules were broken. As I mentioned the employment region was 10.3%.

What is clear is that hon. members opposite stand here day after day and say they want to kill these very important programs. Here and nationally that is the message they give. However, back home in their own ridings they say to their own constituents "Yes, we will write letters in support of your undertaking. Yes, we think these grants and contributions make a difference". They cannot have it both ways.

**Mr. Monte Solberg (Medicine Hat, Ref.):** Mr. Speaker, what we want to do is clear up a billion dollar bungle that the government and this minister continue to perpetuate.

Given that the minister did not receive treasury board approval, and she absolutely did not, rather obviously, under whose authority did she break the rules to reward her own riding with \$640,000 in CJF grants? Whose authority?

• (1420)

**Hon. Jane Stewart (Minister of Human Resources Development, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, no rules were broken. A billion dollars are not missing. I am taking the responsibility as minister to fix the administrative problems in my department, and it will be done.

### Oral Questions

[Translation]

#### HERITAGE CANADA

**Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, when we look at the figures for Canada Day, we see that the Department of Canadian Heritage spent \$3.5 million in Quebec in 1999—

**Some hon. members:** Hear, hear.

**The Speaker:** Order, please. The leader of the Bloc Québécois.

**Mr. Gilles Duceppe:** The cheerleaders are getting worked up, Mr. Speaker.

As I was saying, in 1999 the Department of Canadian Heritage spent \$3.5 million in Quebec out of a budget of \$5.4 million. This represents 65% of the total envelope.

**Some hon. members:** Hear, hear.

**Mr. Gilles Duceppe:** Could the minister tell us the reason for this unusual generosity toward Quebec?

**Hon. Sheila Copps (Minister of Canadian Heritage, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, it is a fact that, on average, 50% of the cultural budget of the Department of Canadian Heritage is spent in Quebec.

**Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ):** I will rephrase the question, Mr. Speaker.

Ontario gets \$500,000 for Canada Day, while Quebec gets \$3.5 million. There are 43 laboratories and research centres in Ottawa, but none in Quebec. We would trade some fireworks for a few laboratories.

Is the truth not found in the letter written by Canada Day president, Serge Savard, where he says that the federal government must ensure greater visibility in sovereignist strongholds—

**Hon. Pierre S. Pettigrew:** There are fewer and fewer of them.

**Mr. Gilles Duceppe:** Mr. Speaker, if the minister—

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

**The Speaker:** Order, please, the leader of the Bloc Québécois.

**Mr. Gilles Duceppe:** Mr. Speaker, I was amazed to hear the Minister for International Trade speak. I thought he had lost the ability.

**Some hon. members:** Hear, hear.

**Mr. Gilles Duceppe:** I would like the minister to tell us if that is not the real reason, because Serge Savard thought he should depoliticize Canada Day.

**Hon. Sheila Copps (Minister of Canadian Heritage, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I would like to remind the member of the facts. The

*Oral Questions*

fact is that 28% of the money spent on research by the Government of Canada is spent in Quebec.

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

**Hon. Sheila Copps:** In addition, 33% of money invested in the private sector is invested in Quebec. I have never heard the member opposite complain about the fact that 50% of cultural funding goes to Quebec.

**Mr. Pierre de Savoye (Portneuf, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, in the same letter to the Minister of Canadian Heritage, it is said that officials from Heritage Canada pose as volunteers on Canada Day, when they are in fact paid out of the department's budgets.

How can the minister explain that these pseudo-volunteers are paid time and a half for the first seven hours and then double time to work on Canada Day, this with public moneys?

**Hon. Sheila Copps (Minister of Canadian Heritage, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I simply remind the member that those who complain because we try to celebrate our country should know that we do intend to celebrate it and we want to do it in every riding.

This is why we have a Canada Day celebration committee in the riding of Rimouski. I think the hon. member for Rimouski—Mitis is very aware of the existence of that committee.

We attended Family Day in Chicoutimi. We also helped the Association des bénévoles de l'hôpital Saint-Félix—

**The Speaker:** The hon. member for Portneuf.

• (1425)

**Mr. Pierre de Savoye (Portneuf, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, I think the minister is suffering from the same syndrome as does the Minister of Human Resources Development.

The director general of the Quebec region himself complained that this use of public moneys was depriving him of money needed for his normal operations. Incidentally, since the near-victory of the yes side in the 1995 referendum, the Canada Day budget has increased by 1,120%.

Is this an illustration of Pierre Trudeau's view, who said that the best way to counterbalance the appeal of separatism was to allocate time, energy and huge amounts of money to—

**The Speaker:** The hon. Minister of Canadian Heritage.

**Hon. Sheila Copps (Minister of Canadian Heritage, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, we are not afraid to recognize that we are a country, that we are still a country, all the more so since Bloc Quebecois members made requests of that nature. For example, the member for Manicouagan asked for 75 Canadian flags of a certain size, the member for Portneuf wants 300 flags of—

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

**The Speaker:** Order, please. The hon. member for Winnipeg—Transcona.

\* \* \*

[English]

**GASOLINE PRICES**

**Mr. Bill Blaikie (Winnipeg—Transcona, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Industry. Yesterday the minister indicated that he thought the rising price of oil and gas was strictly a provincial matter, which is an odd point of view given that the Governor of the Bank of Canada thinks it is an issue, as does the Chairman of the Federal Reserve in the United States. Even President Bill Clinton has expressed his concern about it.

Is there a pattern here of not being able to stand up to the oil and gas industry? First the Minister of Foreign Affairs collapses over Sudan and then the Minister of Industry will not take his responsibilities, washing his hands of the problem of rising oil and gas prices.

When will the government express its concern and when will the government take its responsibility and tell the House what it intends to do about rising oil and gas prices?

**Hon. John Manley (Minister of Industry, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, to that remarkably foolish question let me say that we have expressed our concern over gas prices repeatedly on this side of the House. We have financed several studies by the Competition Bureau into determining whether there is competition in the industry. The competition police so far have not found any offence under the Competition Act.

The superlative investigative skills of the New Democratic Party apparently can find such evidence when all the police at the Competition Bureau cannot. Congratulations to them. Let them give us the evidence and then we will proceed under the proper law.

**Mr. Bill Blaikie (Winnipeg—Transcona, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, Canadians cannot burn Liberal studies in their cars. They burn gas and oil and they want to know that something can be done about it.

I will perhaps ask the Minister of the Environment or the Minister of Natural Resources a supplementary question, because the underlying issue here is whether or not we are going to eventually break our dependence on these kinds of fuels, on exhaustible resources and on the internal combustion engine.

I want to ask the appropriate minister this question. Does the government have any new plan, given the fact that these high prices may be maintained, for breaking our dependence on the internal

combustion engine and finally getting around to doing many of the things that were recommended in the seventies and eighties?

**Hon. Ralph E. Goodale (Minister of Natural Resources and Minister responsible for the Canadian Wheat Board, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, if the hon. gentleman followed the policy announcements and the investment plans of the Government of Canada, he would know among other things that we have made very substantial investments in support of fuel cell technology which holds enormous promise for the future, with a burgeoning industry in British Columbia and across the country led by the Ballard corporation that the government is very strongly supporting.

We are also investing with the Iogen Corporation of Ottawa in alternative fuels such as ethanol which can reduce the CO<sub>2</sub> emissions by up to 90%. Yes, indeed, we are pursuing the new innovations and the new fuels of the 21st century.

\* \* \*

• (1430)

#### HUMAN RESOURCES DEVELOPMENT

**Mr. Peter MacKay (Pictou—Antigonish—Guysborough, PC):** Mr. Speaker, yesterday in the House the Minister for HRDC stated that she was using Statistics Canada figures to justify TIF money that was flowing into her riding. We have been informed by Statistics Canada that they do not produce unemployment numbers on a riding by riding basis.

My question to the minister is very simple. Where did the minister get her numbers?

**Hon. Jane Stewart (Minister of Human Resources Development, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I repeat again that they did come from Statistics Canada. That process has now stopped, but in the context of this project the numbers that were made available to the department came from Statistics Canada and they indicated quite clearly that this was an area of high unemployment.

**Mr. Peter MacKay (Pictou—Antigonish—Guysborough, PC):** Mr. Speaker, in recent conversations with an official from StatsCan we were told “I am very suspicious. I don’t know how HRDC comes up with these numbers”.

Given this direct contradiction, can the minister tell us why she is using bogus numbers to circumvent the rules for her own department?

**Hon. Jane Stewart (Minister of Human Resources Development, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, let me say again that the riding of Brant was an area of very high unemployment, spiking at over 14%. Very clearly the program, the transitional jobs fund, was there to assist

ridings like mine. I am absolutely convinced that it is these programs that have helped men and women in my riding find opportunities that otherwise would not have been there.

**Mr. Jason Kenney (Calgary Southeast, Ref.):** Mr. Speaker, the minister’s nose is growing. A minute ago she told us—

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

**The Speaker:** Order, please. I ask the hon. member to choose his words wisely.

**Mr. Jason Kenney:** I will, Mr. Speaker, and I wish the minister would choose her statistics wisely. A moment ago she told us that the unemployment rate in 1997 in her riding was 10.3%. I have in my hand the unemployment statistics of the human resources development department for Haldimand—Norfolk—Brant with respect to comparative unemployment rates, which indicate in 1997 an average rate of 8.4%, and in every month, save one, a lower unemployment rate than Ontario and the national average.

How can this minister stand in her place and not tell the truth, that her riding did not—

**The Speaker:** The hon. member for Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup—Témiscouata—Les Basques.

[Translation]

**Mr. Paul Crête (Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup—Témiscouata—Les Basques, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, when we asked the Minister of Human Resources Development yesterday about the Corbeil case, she said that it had been settled in law. Corbeil has acknowledged his guilt and therefore acknowledged having acted illegally. But what has not yet been settled is the fact that it seems it is easier to get a hold of the lists of projects when it is illegal than when it is legal.

Could the minister explain why members are unable to get details on the files of Human Resources Development Canada for their own ridings today?

[English]

**Hon. Jane Stewart (Minister of Human Resources Development, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I categorically reject the statements made by the member opposite. I remind the House again that he himself talked about the transitional jobs fund and was congratulating himself as an opposition member for being so successful in getting these projects in his own riding.

[Translation]

**Mr. Paul Crête (Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup—Témiscouata—Les Basques, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, in Quebec, 318 Canada jobs fund projects were approved in 43 ridings, that is, an average of six per riding, excluding Anjou—Rivière-des-Prairies, which received 54.

*Oral Questions*

Why is it so difficult for members to obtain documents pertaining to their files when there are so few? Could I have an answer?

[English]

**Hon. Jane Stewart (Minister of Human Resources Development, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, let me say again, as I have said on a number of occasions in the House and at committee, that I have heard the messages from members of parliament. I have asked my department to look at all the grants and contributions to see if indeed they can put the information together in a way that will be useful to members of parliament. We are working on that undertaking and I will provide the information when it is available.

**Mr. Paul Forseth (New Westminster—Coquitlam—Burnaby, Ref.):** Mr. Speaker, we are not asking about whether or not the HRDC grants were good. We can get to that later. What we are asking about is what criteria was used to approve the grants given in 1999. The rules required 10% unemployment or more in 1997. The riding of Brant clearly did not qualify.

• (1435)

Under what criteria did the human resources minister approve Canada jobs fund grants in her riding?

**Hon. Jane Stewart (Minister of Human Resources Development, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, again I want to make it clear that I did not personally approve projects in my riding after becoming minister.

I want to say that under the Canada jobs fund the economic region in which my riding falls had an unemployment rate of 10.3% and it qualified for these projects.

**Mr. Paul Forseth (New Westminster—Coquitlam—Burnaby, Ref.):** Mr. Speaker, Canadians are not buying these answers. Surely the HRDC minister has a requirement to follow department rules about grants, yet she approved two grants just last November, knowing full well that her area did not qualify. There were no pockets of unemployment. The offence is very clear.

The question remains, under what authority did the human resources minister approve those 1999 grants for her riding? Maybe a special deal with the Minister of Finance?

**Hon. Jane Stewart (Minister of Human Resources Development, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, what Canadians are not buying is that this party stands in the House day after day and says “Transitional jobs funds, Canada jobs funds, get rid of them. We do not want them”, while at the same time individual members, like the member for Nanaimo—Cowichan, the member for Kootenay—Columbia and the member for Skeena, write to support their individual constituents who are the beneficiaries of these very important programs.

Canadians know that this party cannot have it both ways.

[Translation]

**Mr. Stéphan Tremblay (Lac-Saint-Jean, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Human Resources Development has passed severe judgment on the administration of her predecessor in that portfolio, in describing his administration as fit for the Middle Ages.

That judgment notwithstanding, and despite all that has been said or written on the matter, the Minister for International Trade remains imperturbable.

Can the minister tell this House whether he feels implicated by the very harsh judgment by his colleague of his administration of the department of Human Resources Development?

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

**The Speaker:** The hon. member may ask his second question.

**Mr. Stéphan Tremblay (Lac-Saint-Jean, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, when in Paris, the Minister for International Trade announced that he would answer press questions once he returned to Ottawa. He changed his mind, of his own accord surely, once he got back here.

Yesterday, the minister said he had made the decision, on his own, not to answer questions by parliamentarians on his time at Human Resources Development Canada.

Is he capable, on his own, of changing his mind and, on his honour and by his own decision, of appearing before the committee?

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

**The Speaker:** The hon. member for Calgary—Nose Hill.

[English]

**Mrs. Diane Ablonczy (Calgary—Nose Hill, Ref.):** Mr. Speaker, we have a very serious matter on our hands today because the Minister of Human Resources Development has stood in the House and said that her riding qualified for CJF grants because it had an unemployment rate of 10.3%. However, I hold in my hand the statistics from her very own department for Brant, which show that in no month for the operative year was unemployment at 10.3%. In fact, the average for that year was 8.4%.

I invite the minister to explain this very clear discrepancy.

**Hon. Jane Stewart (Minister of Human Resources Development, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, the riding of Brant qualified for Canada jobs funds as a result of being part of the Niagara economic region which had an unemployment rate of 10.3%.

These programs have made a difference in my community, and I remind the opposition members that there were times when they came to my riding and they spoke about how difficult the times

*Oral Questions*

were there. They challenged me as a member of parliament to stand and do something for my community.

We have done that and I am very proud of it.

**Mrs. Diane Ablonczy (Calgary—Nose Hill, Ref.):** Mr. Speaker, I suggest to the minister that her pride is sadly misplaced because she cannot and has not produced justification for putting money into her riding. She brings forward figures which are not supported either by Statistics Canada or by her own department.

• (1440)

I think it is very important that this minister restore some credibility to what she is saying and explain and produce the documents that she is basing her allegations on because clearly something is not adding up.

**Hon. Jane Stewart (Minister of Human Resources Development, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, we see time and time again the inability of the Reform Party to understand these programs, to understand the audit, to mix messages and mix information.

I have made it very clear that in the context of the Canada jobs fund my riding was eligible as a result of being part of the Niagara economic region which had an unemployment rate of 10.3%.

I would ask hon. members opposite to take the time to get either a technical briefing or read the material that has been made available on these programs and on the internal audit.

\* \* \*

[Translation]

**PARENTAL INSURANCE**

**Mrs. Christiane Gagnon (Québec, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, the Government of Quebec is working on a parental insurance plan, which has received widespread support from all quarters in Quebec. Quebec is claiming its share of the \$300 million that the federal government wants to invest in a similar, Canada-wide program. The Minister of Human Resources Development left the door open to an agreement in this regard.

Could the minister tell us when she intends to grant the Government of Quebec's request, so that Quebec can go ahead with its plan for 2001?

[English]

**Hon. Jane Stewart (Minister of Human Resources Development, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I remind the House that we entered into negotiations with the Government of Quebec on this issue in 1997. Indeed they left the table. We felt we had made a fair offer and they chose to leave the table. That offer is still on the table.

As for our responsibilities and interests now, we indicated in the Speech from the Throne that we are going to focus on parental

benefits, to expand them and make them more accessible and flexible. That is where my attention is turned.

\* \* \*

**IMMIGRATION**

**Mr. Lynn Myers (Waterloo—Wellington, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, the province of Ontario is concerned that the federal government is not expediting the immigration process to help fill the need for cancer radiologists.

Can the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration explain to the House exactly what is going on?

**Hon. Elinor Caplan (Minister of Citizenship and Immigration, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I first learned about this situation from the newspaper. I got the facts and I picked up the phone and called Cancer Care Ontario because I was concerned that we in immigration could do our part to ensure that Ontario had the human resources necessary to deliver cancer care to people. I did not play politics like Mike Harris; I picked up the phone.

This problem is the result of the cuts that he made to the program. Notwithstanding that, all he had to do, all the minister of health had to do and all the minister of citizenship and immigration for Ontario had to do was to call to ask for my help. I would have done everything I could. They did not call and I was very—

**The Speaker:** The hon. member for Okanagan—Coquihalla.

\* \* \*

**HUMAN RESOURCES DEVELOPMENT**

**Mr. Jim Hart (Okanagan—Coquihalla, Ref.):** Mr. Speaker, yesterday the member for Hamilton Mountain said that Duchess Foods never went to HRDC. She said that Duchess Foods never asked for a grant and that, in fact, Duchess Foods never asked for anything at all.

Why did the minister of HRDC give \$370,000 in a grant to move jobs, not create jobs, but to move jobs from Hamilton Mountain, a short distance down the road, to the minister's riding? Why did she do that?

**Hon. Jane Stewart (Minister of Human Resources Development, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, indeed Duchess Foods was looking for expanded property. They worked with the economic development officials in the city of Hamilton and could find no suitable properties. They looked farther afield and indeed came to the riding of Brant. We were glad to welcome them and additional jobs have been created.

**Mr. Jim Hart (Okanagan—Coquihalla, Ref.):** Mr. Speaker, there is no doubt it was a business decision, but the member for

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Hamilton Mountain did say that Duchess Foods did not go to HRDC. In fact, they never asked for any money whatsoever.

If Duchess Foods did not ask for any money, why did the minister give \$370,000 to Duchess Foods? Was it not just to enhance the minister's own political career?

• (1445)

**Hon. Jane Stewart (Minister of Human Resources Development, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, as is the intention of the program, we wanted to ensure that members of the community in my riding had opportunities for work that did not exist before. The men and women who had not been able to find employment because of particular circumstances had the opportunity to have the dignity of a job.

In this particular context, there were several community partners, including the federation of agriculture, that were looking for value added opportunities in the agricultural area for our community. They supported us as did others in this investment.

**Mrs. Michelle Dockrill (Bras d'Or—Cape Breton, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, in September 1998 Scotia Rainbow, a company owned by Serge Lafrenière, an influential Liberal supporter, received a TJF grant of \$750,000.

Through access to information we have learned two conflicting versions of the Scotia Rainbow story. One is that it received \$1 million from TJF. The other is that it received \$2 million from TJF.

Can the minister explain how a \$750,000 grant became a \$2 million cheque to a big Liberal supporter?

**Hon. Jane Stewart (Minister of Human Resources Development, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, we are very proud of the investments that the Government of Canada has made in the province of the hon. member. That province has had considerable concerns with providing employment opportunities to its members. As a partner in all these undertakings, we know that the federal government can help make a difference. It has done so in Bras d'Or and in other parts of Cape Breton.

**Mrs. Michelle Dockrill (Bras d'Or—Cape Breton, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, the minister knows the NDP are not against good job creation initiatives, but this is about the integrity of the government and the minister.

Documents clearly show Scotia Rainbow received \$2 million for job creation, but the company's financial statement shows that it only spent 7% of that money on salaries.

Is this the minister's definition of job creation or a way to funnel money to Liberal supporters?

**Hon. Jane Stewart (Minister of Human Resources Development, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, again I worked with the hon. member in

terms of helping her provide opportunities for the men and women in her riding.

These programs, whether they be transitional jobs fund or Canada jobs fund, have made a real difference in the province of Nova Scotia and they will continue to do so.

**Mr. Jean Dubé (Madawaska—Restigouche, PC):** Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Human Resources Development likes to use the term pockets of unemployment. There is no mention of pockets of unemployment in the criteria for HRDC. I assume she was referring to the ridings of Sarnia and Hamilton Mountain which saw two companies pull out and move to the minister's riding. Her riding received close to \$2 million in TJF funds, yet the minister's riding did not qualify for TJF.

Did the minister use her cabinet clout as a minister to have her riding qualify?

**Hon. Jane Stewart (Minister of Human Resources Development, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, absolutely not.

**Mr. Jean Dubé (Madawaska—Restigouche, PC):** Mr. Speaker, according to Statistics Canada the riding of Brant did not qualify for TJF funding. It did not qualify using the economic region criteria. It did not qualify according to data for the city of Brantford. It did not qualify according to the county of Brant statistics that the minister selectively used on Monday.

I am willing to table my statistics. Is the minister willing to table hers?

**Hon. Jane Stewart (Minister of Human Resources Development, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I say again that the riding did qualify as a result of Statistics Canada numbers.

I want to make it clear to the House that no jobs were taken from other communities. I have explained the Duchess circumstances. It came as a business opportunity and created extra jobs. With regard to RMH, I am glad to say that that company is expanding and just recently opened a call centre in the city of Sarnia.

\* \* \*

**PULP AND PAPER INDUSTRY**

**Mrs. Marlene Jennings (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, the federal government in partnership with the Pulp and Paper Institute of Canada and its members participated in a research program to achieve a progressive closure system in Canadian pulp and paper mills.

I would like the Secretary of State for Science, Research and Development to tell us just what the implications and benefits of this research program can be for Canada.

• (1450)

[Translation]

**Hon. Gilbert Normand (Secretary of State (Science, Research and Development), Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for her interesting question.

On Friday, February 11, I announced a \$9 million investment by Technology Partnerships Canada in research into the latest environmental technologies for reducing pollution from Canadian pulp and paper plants.

Research will be done by PAPRICAN, the Pulp and Paper Research Institute of Canada in Pointe-Claire, Quebec—which proves that research is being done in Quebec—and will generate 176 senior level jobs in Pointe-Claire. This project is indicative of the importance to Canada's future of investing in the knowledge economy and in this way we will work to build—

**The Speaker:** The hon. member for Calgary East.

\* \* \*

[English]

#### HUMAN RESOURCES DEVELOPMENT

**Mr. Deepak Obhrai (Calgary East, Ref.):** Mr. Speaker, not only did Duchess Foods receive transitional jobs funds, it also received \$1.5 million from the Business Development Bank of Canada, as well as the targeted wage subsidies. Altogether 90% of the move was financed by the federal government. Is it a legitimate role of the federal government to pay the moving costs of profitable companies?

**Hon. Jane Stewart (Minister of Human Resources Development, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, the hon. member gives me the opportunity to say again that on this side of the House we do believe that the Government of Canada has a role to play in communities one by one by one across the country where we find there are problems. On that side of the House they would like issues of unemployment to fester. They would like people to just stand on their own and look after themselves.

This is one of the fundamental, philosophical differences that we find between this side of the House and that party. I think that Canadians want the truth of this. Instead, they stand here and undermine these projects in the House, yet go home and tell their constituents that they support them.

[Translation]

**Mr. Gilles Ducespe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, the Standing Committee on Human Resources Development has decided to ask former deputy minister Mel Cappe and the President of the Treasury Board to appear, to try to shed light on the serious problems at the Department of Human Resources Department.

#### Oral Questions

Does the minister not agree that her predecessor's testimony would be at least as important to better understand what occurred in her department? I am asking the question to the current minister, since the Minister for International Trade does not want to answer for his actions.

**Hon. Don Boudria (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, citation 410 of Beauchesne's is very clear in that regard.

[English]

Citation 410(16) reads:

Ministers may be questioned only in relation to current portfolios.

[Translation]

Period. In French, in English and in Latin.

\* \* \*

[English]

#### AGRICULTURE

**Mr. Dick Proctor (Palliser, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, the agriculture minister is begging other nations to reduce their trade distorting subsidies which he said last week are the root cause of the devastating drop in the incomes of Canadian grain farmers. Whether they are the culprits or not, the minister knows that reducing subsidies are years if not light years away.

By adopting such a paws up supine position, is the minister suggesting that Canada is so impoverished that it cannot afford to invest in our grain farmers to the same extent that other nations are investing in theirs?

**Hon. Lyle Vanclief (Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, we have the support of our farmers across Canada in addressing the unfortunate circumstances they are in due to a number of issues, whether it be the weather, international market prices, or an unfair and unlevel playing field as far as subsidies are concerned. Probably our pockets in Canada are not as deep as those in some other countries. We recognize that.

We as the federal government are there. I would encourage the hon. member to return to his home province to be there too with the federal government.

\* \* \*

#### NATIONAL DEFENCE

**Mrs. Elsie Wayne (Saint John, PC):** Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of National Defence.

We have heard for the last two weeks about mismanagement in HRDC. Is it mismanagement in defence or the lack of will of the minister that we do not have replacements for those aging Sea Kings that are jeopardizing the lives of the pilots?

**Hon. Arthur C. Eggleton (Minister of National Defence, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, we are not jeopardizing the lives of any pilots.

*Oral Questions*

We make sure that our equipment is safe to fly before it is put in the air.

I have indicated before that it is the government's highest priority to replace the Sea Kings. We are on a clear path that involves the replacement of the current helicopter by 2005 and we will continue in that direction. Meanwhile we will make sure that any aircraft put up in the air is safe to fly.

\* \* \*

• (1455)

**HUMAN RESOURCES DEVELOPMENT**

**Mrs. Diane Ablonczy (Calgary—Nose Hill, Ref.):** Mr. Speaker, the minister so far has failed to explain why her statistics are not validated by either Statistics Canada or her own department. There is some question about whether Brantford is even in the Hamilton-Niagara Peninsula, which is the economic region that is used by Statistics Canada for some statistical purposes.

Would it not be simple for the minister to table the document or the statistics on which she is relying so that this matter can be cleaned up very quickly?

**Hon. Jane Stewart (Minister of Human Resources Development, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, that is the hon. member who in a press release talked about my riding as being very close to the city of Toronto. When the people in my riding read about that, they knew that the messages and allegations that were being presented by that party were absolutely unfounded and not worth listening to.

I say again in the context of the transitional jobs fund and the Canada jobs fund, they have made a difference in my riding. No rules were broken. Men and women who otherwise would not be working are working.

\* \* \*

[Translation]

**HOUSING**

**Ms. Raymonde Folco (Laval West, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, yesterday, the minister responsible for the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation announced the granting of 14 financial contributions through the Affordability and Choice Today program, the ACT.

Could the minister explain to the House how this program can help Canadians find affordable housing?

**Hon. Alfonso Gagliano (Minister of Public Works and Government Services, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, the Affordability and Choice Today program is the result of a partnership with the Federation of Canadian Municipalities, the Canadian Home Builders' Association and the Canadian Housing and Renewal Association.

This year, one of the 14 projects that we are sponsoring is a proposal to turn an abandoned plant into a place to live and work

for young professionals and self-employed workers. This is a good program to create affordable housing.

\* \* \*

**ANTIPERSONNEL MINES**

**Mr. René Laurin (Joliette, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, Canada has assumed the lead role internationally in opposing the use of antipersonnel mines. It signed the UN international treaty on this. It passed Bill C-22 banning these mines and with great pomp and circumstance made the announcement in November 1997 that it had destroyed the last one, boasting about this every chance it got.

How can the minister explain that Canadian soldiers are using Claymore mines in East Timor, since these are as deadly as other antipersonnel mines?

[English]

**Hon. Arthur C. Eggleton (Minister of National Defence, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, Claymores are not land mines. Claymores are used as any other weapon would be used in a defensive fashion. They create a shotgun approach. If the troops that are on the defensive are outnumbered by those on the offence, they would only be used under those kind of circumstances, and with somebody actually pulling a trigger. They are not like a land mine that is put in the ground and which somebody trips over to set it off. They are not in the same category.

Canada fully complies with the anti-personnel land mines treaty.

\* \* \*

**NATIONAL DEFENCE**

**Mr. Gordon Earle (Halifax West, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, while the government has indicated that it will make it easier for those veterans labelled as suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder to apply for pensions, the big question of depleted uranium remains unaddressed.

Depleted uranium was found in the body of Nova Scotia veteran Terry Riordon. There are others seeking testing and treatment for depleted uranium.

Will the government ensure speedy, thorough and efficient testing in the treatment of CF members and veterans, and take a leadership role in calling for an international treaty banning the use of depleted uranium in weapons?

**Hon. Arthur C. Eggleton (Minister of National Defence, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, the announcement from my colleague the Minister of Veterans Affairs is most welcome in terms of the pensions for those who have suffered from post-traumatic stress disorder.

• (1500)

That is completely in accordance with what my department and what the government want to do. We want to look after our troops.

*Points of Order*

We want to make sure if any of them go over healthy and come back sick that in fact we look after them. [English]

In terms of depleted uranium I have indicated that we do want people who feel they might have been affected to come forward. They will be tested. We will give them every opportunity to do so. We want to make sure that they are properly looked after.

**Mrs. Elsie Wayne (Saint John, PC):** Mr. Speaker, I guess maybe the Minister of National Defence should apply to HRDC to get enough money to buy the Sea Kings that we need. That is probably the way he could get it.

The government cancelled the EH-101 contract, which was the helicopter we should have today. We have lost lives. We have heard throughout the past year from the minister that the government is to replace the Sea Kings. When will it replace the Sea Kings?

**Hon. Arthur C. Eggleton (Minister of National Defence, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I answered that in the previous question, but let me say something else. If the Conservatives when they were in power had not bungled the helicopter matter, spending far more money than what was needed for a helicopter that was totally inappropriate for today's needs, we would be a lot further ahead in terms of this replacement at this point in time. They wasted taxpayer money.

\* \* \*

[Translation]

**PRIVILEGE**

## ORAL QUESTION PERIOD

**Mr. Pierre de Savoye (Portneuf, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, during Oral Question Period, I asked the Minister of Canadian Heritage to explain the use of public funds for purposes other than those for which they were intended.

In her response, the minister reproached me for having distributed 300 Canadian flags in my riding.

I consider it my privilege to rectify both the facts and the reproaches relating to the carrying out of my legitimate duties as a member of parliament coming from the Minister of Canadian Heritage.

First of all, as far as the facts are concerned, I wish to inform this House that I received from the Minister of Canadian Heritage a single box of 75 Canada flags and not—

**The Speaker:** This is not a question of privilege, it is merely debate.

**Mr. Pierre de Savoye:** Perhaps the second part, Mr. Speaker—

**The Speaker:** That is enough.

**POINTS OF ORDER**

## ORAL QUESTION PERIOD

**Mr. Jason Kenney (Calgary Southeast, Ref.):** Mr. Speaker, during the course of the question period just ended Your Honour ruled out of order, I presume, the question I put to the Minister of Human Resources Development and did not permit me to put a second question.

I infer from the Speaker's ruling that you objected to my use of the term not telling the truth. I refer Your Honour to article 490 of Beauchesne's which states:

Since 1958, it has been ruled parliamentary to use—

• (1505 )

**The Speaker:** I refer the hon. member to Standing Order 18 on page 522 of the M and M. I would hope that all hon. members would take to heart what has transpired in the last few days. If I might permit myself this small comment, I appreciate the fact that the House generally and all of us here are possibly trying to rectify what went on in the last few days.

As much as possible I am trying to keep it so hon. members can be heard and the people giving answers can be heard. I would hope that we would not use terms which would cause disorder because that is what I am referring to. I consider this matter to be closed.

## PARLIAMENTARY LANGUAGE

**Mr. Jay Hill (Prince George—Peace River, Ref.):** Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. In preparing for question period every day it is important for us, in preparing our questions, to know what language we can or cannot use. Our only reference is to the standing orders, Beauchesne's and other reference books.

It would help us a great deal, Mr. Speaker, if somehow you could provide a list of what words and terms we can use so that we do not have you interrupt our questions.

**The Speaker:** I wish I could give the member a precise list. Usually I am guided by what transpires in the question period. To that effect, some days members use a certain term and there is no reaction in any part of the House.

When there is disorder I try to rectify it so that we can get on with the question period. Indeed, that is what many members urged me to do yesterday. I am trying to conduct our business in as good a fashion as I can.

[Translation]

**Mr. Pierre de Savoye (Portneuf, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, I have always felt that the work a member does in his riding should be non-partisan. After all, we are representing all of our constituents.

*Supply*

In the riding of Portneuf, there are citizens who want Canadian flags and, until today, I made a point of getting them for them. There is not a huge demand, but I felt that it was my duty as an MP to respond to it.

The minister's remarks suggest that she does not feel that this is my job and I hereby announce that I am going to give her back the flags I have left.

**The Speaker:** That is not a question of privilege.

\* \* \*

[English]

**BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE**

**Mr. Chuck Strahl (Fraser Valley, Ref.):** Mr. Speaker, I will try to use very temperate language and make this as straightforward as I can. Could the government House leader give us some idea of what we can expect for government business tomorrow and for the early part of next week?

• (1510)

Perhaps he could also let us know whether he expects the debates to go on and on, or whether he plans to bring in time allocation on any of the bills.

**Hon. Don Boudria (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, today is a Bloc Quebecois opposition day.

[Translation]

Tomorrow, Friday, we will deal with Bill C-16. Naturally, I would have liked to examine Bill C-13 on Canadian Institutes of Health Research but, so far, no consensus has been reached for speedy passage of this bill.

In the afternoon, we will proceed to third reading of Bill C-10, the Municipal Grants Act.

[English]

Next Monday we will return to Bill C-23, the benefits and obligations modernization legislation. On Tuesday we will return to Bill C-2, the elections bill. On Wednesday we shall either take up one of the bills listed for Friday morning or we shall commence on the airlines bill introduced earlier this day. Next Thursday shall be an allotted day.

I noted with interest when the hon. member asked me if there was an intention on the part of the opposition to obstruct the legislation presently before the House. I am sorry that I cannot answer that question. I am not privy to that, but he can rest assured that if the opposition provides obstruction the government will behave in its usual and non-partisan objective way to ensure that the program of the government is fulfilled.

**GOVERNMENT ORDERS**

[Translation]

**SUPPLY**

ALLOTTED DAY—LEGISLATIVE COMMITTEE ON BILL C-20

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

**Mrs. Francine Lalonde (Mercier, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to speak on the motion of the Bloc Quebecois ordering the legislative committee studying Bill C-20 to hold public hearings in all regions of Quebec and Canada so as to hear as many witnesses as possible having an interest in this bill, and expressing other considerations.

It is important to explain to Quebecers and Canadians why the Bloc Quebecois, with the support of all opposition parties, is so vocal in its condemnation not only of the so-called clarity bill but also of the process whereby this bill will be rushed through the House.

In the short time I have, I will speak of the content of the bill as well as of the accelerated process. This bill, which is entitled—we have no choice but to say it, as but we find that it is not well named—an act to give effect to the requirement for clarity. For the record, this bill was born under the influence of the instigator of the government's plan B, in the days following the referendum where the yes side almost won.

In short, plan B was the stick while plan A, which we have heard little about, was supposed to be the carrot, a very small, transparent, translucent, genetically engineered carrot we have not often seen.

• (1515)

What we have been hearing about, since the 1995 referendum, which was almost won but was unfortunately lost, is plan B. When history is written, it will be clear that plan B was developed at the instigation of the current Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs.

It is interesting to remind the House that, as early as 1992, this minister, then a professor, gave advice to Premier Bourassa, saying that "Mr. Bourassa must draw the conclusions from these endless negotiations that are leading nowhere. He must come to the defence of Canada such as it is today and tell Quebecers that constitutional amendments will not happen in the foreseeable future, even if it means telling Quebecers that an economic association between an independent Quebec and the rest of Canada would be equally improbable".

The current Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, realizing that Canada would never follow up on what has been called the

traditional demands, or the set of Quebec demands, which were taken up by Claude Ryan, Bourassa and others, said “Since we cannot change it, let us be content with it. Let us be happy. Let us say that we have is good”. But it was not enough because there had been this referendum with a 49.9% yes vote.

What should he do? He had to find the means to scare these proud Gallics from Quebec. To scare them, he developed a scheme and figured it ought to go through the supreme court. He personally put questions to the supreme court, urging it to render a decision on Quebec’s right to unilaterally secede. Never did the Quebec plan involve a unilateral declaration of independence or secession.

In spite of the carefully crafted questions put by the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, in one part of its opinion, the supreme court said something he did not like: a clear majority on a clear question would require Canada to negotiate. If I am digressing here it is because, through the bill, the minister is getting rid of the only part of the supreme court’s opinion that he did not like, that is, the obligation to negotiate.

What does this famous so-called clarity bill do? First, it says that a majority of 50% plus one, which has always been understood in Quebec law as being sufficient to determine if a referendum has been won, is not enough. But it does not say what the majority should be. It only says that the government would consult here and there, and could decide that the majority the referendum got is not sufficient and not clear enough.

What does the bill say about the question? It talks about what the question should not include to get the federal government to negotiate. In fact, it is the federal government, at the instigation of its Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, that would choose the topic of the question. However, this is not included in any way, shape or form in the supreme court’s opinion.

• (1520)

We too sought the opinion of a leading expert, in the person of Alain Pellet, a professor at Université de Paris-Nanterre, who is a member and former chair of the UN International Law Commission. He said the following:

It follows that a clear question on something else than secession [...] would not be incompatible with current international law. Neither the supreme court’s opinion nor the draft bill introduced on December 10, 1999, if passed, would preclude asking such a question.

The government wants to be able to choose the topic of the question and what the majority should be. And there is more. This government, whose bill provides for every legislative assembly in Canada, the Senate and everyone who has an opinion to be consulted on the question, is ramming this bill through the House, and not allowing the committee to travel and listen to Quebecers and Canadians who, for years, have been emotionally involved in

### *Supply*

this very important debate on what is called, in Canada, national unity, and in Quebec, the national issue. It will not let the committee go and hear them.

So it proposes a bill that gives it extraordinary leeway and provides that it consult everybody, but there can be no consultation before passing it.

As a member of the Standing Committee on Human Resources Development, I toured Canada for two months; we travelled to 22 cities, where we listened to Canadians and Quebecers from 9 a.m. to 11 p.m., for two or three days at a time, before tabling a report which was shelved.

The government is acting in an irresponsible, shocking and provocative manner on a bill that will play a key role in the future of both Quebecers and Canadians. But I think that, in acting this way, it also undermines the significance of this bill. Who will give credit and legitimacy to a bill passed like this?

The government itself is undermining the position that it wanted to be so strong, and Quebecers will not be fooled by this bogus exercise.

**Mr. Daniel Turp (Beauharnois—Salaberry, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, I found the remarks of my colleague, the member for Mercier, very interesting. I would like to ask her if the government opposite is likely to find support within Quebec’s civil society.

It is clear that the three parties in the Quebec National Assembly reject Bill C-20. It is clear that here, in the House of Commons, more than 60% of members are also against Bill C-20. But what about the various groups within Quebec’s civil society? What is their reaction to Bill C-20?

**Mrs. Francine Lalonde:** Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for Beauharnois—Salaberry for his question. Quebec’s civil society, which the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs arrogantly referred to as a “mothball group”, cares about democracy in Quebec.

It is unacceptable and incomprehensible that intelligent people like the members opposite cannot understand that closing the door on democracy in Quebec is the same as closing the door on the people of Quebec and that civil society will always defend the people of Quebec.

• (1525)

Our colleagues opposite who are from Quebec should have thought twice. Quebec has always known these two tendencies, one of which is a growing movement, with various stages, and that movement will continue. It is a democratic movement that belongs to the people of Quebec. It is a shame to want to sabotage it, to override it, to close the door on democracy in Quebec, but Quebecers will strike back.

**Mr. Claude Drouin (Beauce, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I would like the member to explain to us how is it that, if this bill is so

*Supply*

undemocratic, the Premier of Quebec, Lucien Bouchard, said that the opinion of the supreme court was an excellent opinion. Bill C-20 is based on that opinion and its purpose is to ensure that Quebecers can clearly decide, with a clear question and a clear majority, if they want to separate from Canada. The question and the rules will be decided by the Quebec National Assembly.

I would like the member to explain to us why she says this bill is undemocratic when Mr. Bouchard said that the opinion on which it is based was a good one. Is she against the leader of the separatists?

**Mrs. Francine Lalonde (Mercier, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, I will gladly answer him.

He did not listen to me. The only thing that the government and the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs do not like is that that opinion—yes, we were proud of it—forces the government to negotiate if the question and the majority are clear.

However, what this bill does is discharge the government from its obligation to negotiate because the government will decide what is a clear question and what is a clear majority. It does not say in the bill what majority means. It is leaving open the possibility of setting the majority as high as it wants.

Above all, it chooses the subject. It refuses the idea of negotiation between equal partners. It refuses the concept of sovereignty partnership which is the way for Quebec. Quebec's sovereigntists do not want to build a fortress around Quebec. They want the establishment of a new and modern relationship with Canada, a type of relationship that our friends opposite promote for other peoples.

If this is good for other peoples, why can it not be good for Quebec and Canada?

**Mr. Stéphane Bergeron (Verchères—Les-Patriotes, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, it is with great pleasure that I speak today, beside my colleague from Laval Centre who has returned to the House today after a period of convalescence.

**Some hon. members:** Hear, hear.

**Mr. Stéphane Bergeron:** Now, on a less happy note, I wish to condemn the odious approach taken by the government in Bill C-20, an act to give effect to the requirement for clarity as set out in the opinion of the Supreme Court of Canada in the Quebec secession reference.

With this bill, and I am choosing my words carefully here, the federal government is using the law for purely partisan reasons and is making a sham of it.

First, I must remind the House that the Supreme Court of Canada never gave the government the responsibility and the power to give

effect, as it says, to the requirement for clarity, which the court allegedly set out. *jugement de la cour. J'ai donc traduit.*

In light of the opinion of the Supreme Court of Canada, and I quote "It is up to the political actors to determine what constitutes a clear majority and a clear question". Contrary to what the federal government claims, the court has given no exclusivity or precedence to any political actor regarding the definition of what would be a clear majority and a clear question. Thus, the federal move blatantly exceeds the scope of the supreme court's opinion.

Besides, concerned by the fact that Quebecers are attracted to the concept of partnership, the federal government claims that is has the power to order that an eventual referendum should deal with only one issue, what Ottawa calls secession, which, again, would go against the spirit and the letter of the supreme court's opinion.

Members will recognize that this is not the first time the federal government violates established constitutional conventions and its own constitution. We need only think of the numerous encroachments by the federal government on provincial jurisdictions.

• (1530)

The choice of terms is not, of course, ever neutral. The court stipulates in fact as follows:

—conferring a right to initiate constitutional change on each participant in Confederation. In our view, the existence of this right imposes a corresponding duty on the participants in Confederation to engage in constitutional discussions in order to acknowledge and address democratic expressions of a desire for change in other provinces.

Thus the future proposals for constitutional changes referred to by the supreme court would not, contrary to federal claims, be limited solely to secession.

In its opinion, the supreme court also takes great care in making it clear that it is speaking of a clear majority in the qualitative sense of the word. It is therefore wrong to claim, as the federal government does unreasonably, that 50% plus one would not, in the eyes of the court, constitute a clear majority. In democracy, 50% plus one is a majority, and in a democracy a majority is clear.

In this connection, I would point out that in a 1991 supreme court decision it was stated that:

—each vote must be relatively equal to every other vote. To water down the importance and significance of an individual's vote is to weaken the democratic process.

This is therefore the court's constant opinion, since it has also concluded in the past that a system which dilutes one citizen's vote unduly as compared with another citizen's vote runs the risk of providing uneven and unfair representation.

*Supply*

We must, therefore, conclude, based on precedents established by the supreme court itself, that the federal manoeuvre is not only potentially illegal and unconstitutional, but also basically undemocratic.

This bill is unacceptable also because the House of Commons would be deciding the acceptability of the question even before the debate on that same question in the Quebec National Assembly is over, and the latter is the legitimate decision-making centre for the entire process leading up to the decision by the Quebec people on its own future.

I would like to raise another profoundly undemocratic element of the process followed by the government, namely the hearing of witnesses during study of Bill C-20 by the legislative committee. If it wants to have a minimum of credibility when claiming that it intends to preserve the integrity of democratic institutions, the federal government must adequately consult the people on a bill that has such an importance for its collective future.

How could the government impose closure on the study of Bill C-20 at second reading? How could it so outrageously limit the number of witnesses that the legislative committee can hear and decide that only those who are duly chosen by one or the other of the five recognized political parties in this House will be heard?

How could it refuse to allow the committee to travel in Quebec and Canada to meet all those who would like to be heard on an issue as fundamental as this one? How could it flout normal parliamentary practice and the most elementary principles of parliamentary consultation, if not because it knows that its tactics does not meet with the approval of the Quebec people and because it wants to proceed quickly enough to prevent any organized opposition to this infamous bill to organize?

Quebec does not have any democracy lessons to receive from anyone, especially not from the federal government. Quebec's democratic institutions are respected and admired all over the world. Furthermore, the level of democratic ethics in Quebec is far superior to the one seen on the federal scene and which sometimes take us back to the dark ages. This is evidenced by the partisan appointment process used by the party in office to select returning officers responsible for the administration of federal elections in each riding, and by the permissiveness that exists at the federal level regarding the rules for political party financing.

Some democracy, when it promotes influence peddling and always allows the affluent to be the strongest voices heard by people's representatives. When one lives in a glass house, one should not throw stones.

"Do as I say, not as I do" goes the old saying. I tell the minister sponsoring Bill C-20, and also government members, that the question asked by the federal government to the Montagnais in the Lac Saint-Jean region is not exactly a model of clarity, a clarity

allegedly being sought by the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs with his bill.

● (1535)

We are talking here about a rather complex question with two components, with only one possible answer, and with references to an agreement and to two sections of an act.

So much for the clarity of the question. How can we presume that the Montagnais of the Lac Saint-Jean region would automatically give the same answer to the two questions?

Why does the government demand a single answer to these two questions? This government, which boasts about having the monopoly on clarity, is asking a very ambiguous question that lends itself to very different interpretations by voters. Sure, the federal government will claim that the 1995 referendum question was not clear. But another saying provides that when in doubt, do nothing.

Since the turnout for the referendum on sovereignty-association on October 30, 1995 was 93%, we conclude without a doubt that Quebecers understood the question put to them and its issues very well.

In order to show that the federal government is not a prophet in its own land, I would add that, for the referendum it is organizing for the Montagnais of Lac St-Jean, the majority acceptable will be 50% plus one of the voters.

The former chief returning officer for Quebec, Pierre F. Côté, said the following when he appeared before the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs in connection with the study of the proposed reform of the Canada Elections Act, and I quote:

For democracy to exist, there must be the appearance of democracy.

In the matter before us here, the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs and the Prime Minister have shown us eloquently that they are striking another undemocratic blow against Quebec.

The day will soon come when the black clouds of federal pettiness will disappear from the democratic landscape of Quebec, the day the government stops mocking Quebec democracy.

We have to recognize the fact. In democracy, all the rules of the game are set in advance. They are clear and remain unchanged from start to finish. We intend to ensure this is the case now and on the day Quebecers democratically create for themselves a country that reflects their abilities and their aspirations. And that country is Quebec.

[English]

**Mr. Derek Lee (Parliamentary Secretary to Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, it is

*Supply*

fairly clear from the words of the hon. member that he is not supporting the legislation currently in front of the House and that in the context of this debate he urges more time and more witnesses for the committee studying the bill.

I am one of those, and I think my constituents are among those who look back at the last referendum and say that we should look at the grouping that lost the last referendum. The oui side lost the last referendum. Was the question clear at that time? I personally do not think so. It was not a clear question. Did they lose clearly? Well, apparently not. If the oui had actually lost the last referendum clearly, it would not be pursuing the issue now.

The last referendum is a wonderful example of why the supreme court has said that for something as final as a separation of a region of this country from Canada we must have a clear majority and a clear question. When the process is over it has to be absolutely clear to those who have lost what has happened so there will not be a repeating process of referenda that will continue to undermine the entire country ad infinitum.

I would also ask a very short question. If 50% plus one is a majority, what is a clear majority?

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Stéphane Bergeron:** Mr. Speaker, I get the feeling that the parliamentary secretary to the government House leader is mixing up all sorts of things.

First of all, we would simply tell him that the best proof that sovereignists respected the 1995 referendum verdict is that Quebec is still part of Canada. Since the Government of Quebec was a sovereigntist government at the time and still is, if it had not respected the verdict of the people, it would have subsequently proclaimed Quebec's sovereignty, which it did not do.

It therefore respected the verdict of the people, even though the referendum results were very close.

• (1540)

That having been said, if, as the federalists argue, Quebec were divisible, the very great majority of Quebec's territory would already have been sovereign since 1995. All regions of Quebec, with the exception perhaps of three, the Outaouais, West Montreal and the Beauce, voted very heavily in favour of sovereignty and yet they are not part of an independent country called Quebec today. They are still part of Canada.

However, in 1995, the possibility of constitutional amendments was held out to the people of Quebec and a small majority was once again misled into voting no. They voted no, probably hoping that the Prime Minister's empty promises would result in a renewed federalism. Once again, as it did 1980, the federal government renege on these promises.

As a result, since the promises made to Quebecers in 1995 were not kept, we are fully entitled to again ask ourselves whether we wish to belong to this country.

I would say to my hon. colleague that the reason I am still promoting Quebec's sovereignty is because in 1997 Quebecers gave me and my 43 Bloc Québécois colleagues a renewed mandate not only to defend their interests but also to promote Quebec's sovereignty here in the House of Commons.

That is what I am going to continue to do because it is why my constituents sent me here.

[*English*]

**Mr. Reg Alcock (Parliamentary Secretary to President of the Queen's Privy Council for Canada and Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, it gives me no great pleasure to be here today speaking to this motion. I have been in the House since 1993. Prior to that I spent five years in the Manitoba legislature in opposition, so I have some sympathy for some of the concerns raised by the opposition.

When the member for Winnipeg—Transcona representing the New Democratic Party raises concerns about the use of time allocation to get the bill into committee, the use of restricting debate in an attempt to get the bill dealt with by the government, I have some sympathy with that. I have a fear at times that we move in ways that make it difficult for the House to give bills the consideration they deserve.

When I listen to what I hear coming from the New Democratic Party, the member in discussion with the minister last night raised some very legitimate concerns which I think the minister will think about. He raised some questions which I think we have to answer. That is what this process is for. That is why we have this kind of examination. It is to hear testimony, to listen to expert opinion, and to challenge each other about what we are trying to create so that we create a better piece of legislation.

I hear the Reform talk about it and the critic for the Reform raise concern about a majority of 50% plus one. It is a very important question. I appreciate his constant pressuring us to think about it. If we are not clear on how we feel about important issues as we approach this very important topic, we will simply do a disservice to everybody that we represent, no matter who we are in the House.

When I hear from the Progressive Conservative Party I feel a little saddened to see that once great national party take the kind of positions that it does and play the kind of divisive game it has chosen to play on this piece of legislation. Frankly, I have tried hard to understand the position of its leader, and I do not. I have considered the arguments very carefully. I know he will come before committee and I will undertake to listen to what he has to say.

*Supply*

• (1545)

When Bloc members stand in the House and talk about democracy, and when they talk about this being an affront to the people of Quebec because we are not being democratic in the way that we approach this bill, I reject that absolutely. I think the Bloc is exactly the wrong party in the House to lecture anybody in Canada about democracy.

What we are trying to do with this bill—and I thought it was talked about very eloquently today by the witnesses who came before the committee—is create a structure around the most important set of discussions our country could have. We are trying to put in place not the decision, not the end point, but the structure within which we have the discussion, something that is extremely difficult to do, to talk about the breakup of our country. Do we not owe it to all the people we represent, no matter where they live in Canada, to put in place a mechanism for having that discussion that allows us to do it in a peaceful and sane manner? We should not simply build upon the little nuances of the argument or inflame the debate for the sake of running up a motion so maybe we can get a decision. Does it not make sense, if we are going to approach such a discussion, that we do it in a way that will not cause more harm to those people to whom we are responsible? That is what the bill is about.

The bill has three clauses. The only thing one of the clauses says is “let us be clear”. If we want to talk about breaking up the country then let us ask the people if they want to break up the country, yes or no. Let us not play with it. Let us not run up motions.

For all the talk about democracy over here, it was the leader of that party who said “Why do we talk about partnership? Because we know that partnership represents seven to eight percentage points more support than the population. Therefore, we must think twice about clarifying the option. So what we will do is keep the options muddy. We will make sure people do not quite understand what they are getting in the vain hopes that they will vote for it”. Is that the way to go into this kind of decision? Does that produce the kind of environment that allows us to actually have this discussion? Does that represent honesty? Does that represent democracy?

I heard a statement which said that the minister was insulting Quebecers because he thought that the result was not clear and that was why we needed some clarity in this. The current premier of Quebec said that they had deliberately made it unclear in order to gain more support. Those are not my words, those are the words of the current premier of Quebec, the former leader of this party. I just do not think that the Bloc has the right to come in here and lecture anybody else in the House about democracy.

On the question of the percentage, I am thinking specifically of some of the questions that the member from the Reform Party

raised. We all have this kind of instinctive sense that 50 plus one makes sense. It gives us one of those comfortable kinds of feelings. However, when we think about this, when we get away from the theatre of this place and away from the charged up atmosphere we get in here under the cameras and all the fighting and debating, which is all very exciting, we must come down to the point where we actually sit down and talk about taking apart the country. Do we not want to be certain that is the will of the people and not a momentary passion?

• (1550)

I think Professor Lebel was very helpful today. He certainly was very helpful to me as he walked through some of that trying to clarify it and trying to make debate real, not in terms of the debate that happens here but the debate that would happen if we were to ever reach that point around a series of tables with the entire population looking on. He said that before we go there, do we not want to be absolutely certain that is where we want to be. We have to be clear but we also have to be sure, and 50% plus one is just too narrow.

My friend, the parliamentary secretary to House leader, asked the obvious question. At the time that the supreme court released its decision, I was here and I went through it very carefully. I heard the Bloc saying that it was great and that it was a good decision by the supreme court. The supreme court said that there has to be a clear majority. If 50% plus one is not a clear majority, my friend asked, then what is an unclear majority? The supreme court clearly differentiated between one kind of a majority and another kind of majority. There is not a lot of room between 50% plus one and 50%.

There is another thing that causes me great conflict. I am from the west and I have not lived this issue the way some have. As a Canadian I have, because it has been a recurring theme throughout my adult life, but I have not lived it, in fairness to the members from Quebec, the way a Quebecer has.

When I came here in 1993, one of the first things I did was to meet up with the hon. member for Québec East in the gym. He taught at the University of Manitoba. He is a member of the Bloc and was the agriculture critic. I had been here for about a week when I met him and I said to him “Help me to understand this. Tell me what is going on”. He recommended a book, which I read. The hon. member for Mercier actually wrote a book and I got her book because I wanted to understand why, when Canada is such an incredible country, that someone would want to smash it apart.

I travel every summer and every chance I get I am in Quebec. I work with members of the Bloc on policy committees, on human resources and on foreign affairs and it is terrific. Those members make valuable contributions. When we talk about virtually every

*Supply*

policy that we deal with, I find I often feel a lot more simpatico with members of the Bloc than, dare I say, with some of my companions from the west in the Reform Party, until we come to this question of breaking up the country. I do not see what we would gain or what the people we represent would gain by doing that. I certainly do not see what any of us would gain if we do it in an atmosphere of confusion.

**Mr. Dennis Gruending (Saskatoon—Rosetown—Biggar, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I listened closely to the comments of the hon. member for Winnipeg South. I want to say that the New Democratic Party supports Bill C-20, the referendum bill, in principle. I believe people in my riding want us to support the bill if the Liberal government will improve it somewhat. It is very important that the Parliament of Canada has something to say in the event that a province decides to secede.

My question for the hon. member revolves around the committee and its hearings which are supposed to elucidate the whole debate around how the bill might be improved.

I believe the hon. member and some of his colleagues not that long ago toured western Canada to decide how the Liberal government might best improve its fortunes there, although I think that is unlikely. In that case it was important to travel. However, we are now hearing that it is completely adequate to simply have television. In other words, people can watch but they cannot participate before the committee. Justifications were given for that today but I do not agree with them.

Given the member's experience travelling in western Canada with the Liberal committee, does he believe that this committee should travel?

**Mr. Reg Alcock:** Mr. Speaker, no, I do not. I have been in opposition in the prairie legislature and I have been here since 1993. I have travelled extensively on some committees and not on others. The hon. member is new in this place. He needs to spend a little time watching how this place operates.

The reality is that we will consult broadly. The minister has been consulting very broadly. What we have said is that we will not bring forward all the witnesses. What we are saying to the New Democratic Party and every party in the House is that they can bring any witnesses they want before the committee and we will listen to all their opinions. We are not closing the door on that.

• (1555)

What we have is a party over there that has said, from the day the bill came in, that the debate does not matter. It does not matter how sincere the member from Winnipeg—Birds Hill is when he comes forward and raises his standard concern with us. It does not matter

what is talked about because the Bloc members want to kill it. This is theatre. It is not work. We want to work and I know the member from Birds Hill wants to work.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. René Laurin (Joliette, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, if I understand what my colleague is saying, he would like Quebecers to be asked a question based on his perception of what we want to do, whereas we want to ask a question based on the perception Quebecers have of what we want to do.

He would like a question based on a negative perception, whereas we want a question based on a positive perception. We want Quebec to be built, we want Canada to be built. We do not want Canada to fall apart, we do not want Quebec to fall apart. This is what is happening while we are living together.

We want a positive position, this is the way we want the question to be asked. We have been explaining it to Quebecers for 30 years now and I believe they understand.

[*English*]

**Mr. Reg Alcock:** Mr. Speaker, I am sorry, but the member's answer lies in the words of his former leader. If he wants that kind of honesty and open discussion, then why does he say that we framed the question this way because we know that more of the population will vote for it than if we framed it another way.

If at the end of the day the question is the separation of the country, what is the problem with clarity? What is the problem with saying "that is what we want". If that is what he wants then he does not need to be playing games with the question. The intention of the question, in the words of his own former leader, was to confuse.

**Mr. Peter MacKay (Pictou—Antigonish—Guysborough, PC):** Mr. Speaker, the hon. member referred to clarity. In reality, when one looks at the bill there is very little that is clear. It is very confusing for Canadians. It is so confusing that last night in committee his minister did not know that the territories, in terms of their having a say, were included in this. The political actors are not clear. The input from aboriginal peoples is not clear. The boundary disputes that could erupt are not clear.

I ask the hon. member to comment on that and give us a direct comment, not the vitriol and the bombast about that party over there siding with the separatists. We are a federalist party. We have always been a plan A party. We have worked very hard, much to the dismay of the hon. member, Mr. McKenna and others, including the Prime Minister who torpedoed attempts to bring Quebec into the federation and try to improve the way the federation worked.

The bill is not about clarity, it is about political advantage. It is about bolstering the Bloc and the Reform Party. What does the hon. member have to say about the real intention of the bill?

**Mr. Reg Alcock:** Mr. Speaker, the irony of this party lecturing anybody on clarity on this particular issue is not lost on anybody in the House. “Exactly what is the policy on that? I am not quite sure what it is”. It depends, of course, on which member we ask and on which day of the week.

Let me quote the former leader of that party, who is now the leader of the opposition in Quebec, who said: “the Quebec government’s strategy has less to do with having the national assembly speak with one voice than with reviving the sovereignty thrust of the party in power”, which is trying to manufacture a crisis so that it can call a referendum. That is what that party is supporting.

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Raymonde Folco (Laval West, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, if I may, I would like to make a few brief comments on the motion before us. I will then deal with the substance of the bill and its intent.

The Bloc members believe the bill is useless and even bad for democracy in Quebec. I believe on the contrary that it is consistent with the democratic tradition both in Quebec and Canada.

• (1600)

In his motion, the Bloc leader thinks, as he said himself, that it is imperative for the legislative committee on Bill C-20 to hold hearings in all regions of Quebec and Canada so as to hear as many witnesses having an interest in the bill as possible. He also demands that the hearings be broadcast and that the committee be given sufficient resources to hold such hearings, all in accordance with the rules and practices of the House.

I am sceptical as to the real meaning of this motion, which is obviously a veiled attempt at partisan politics. The list of witnesses that have already been invited to appear before the committee shows that they are Canadians from all walks of life who want to express their views on a bill aimed at ensuring a clear and straightforward referendum process.

What is the real reason the Bloc Quebecois is asking for such measures? I know the only reason is to try to win the support of Quebecers and other Canadians. The Bloc Quebecois wants to delay the process as much as it can, hoping the public will strongly oppose the bill. From the very beginning, the Bloc laid its cards on the table and showed that it intended to delay the adoption of the bill as long as possible. That is the real purpose of this motion. In these circumstances, one can easily understand that our government cannot support such a motion.

### *Supply*

Now, let us look at the bill itself and its purpose. The purpose of the bill that was introduced is, and I quote, “to give effect to the requirement for clarity set out in the opinion of the Supreme Court of Canada in the Quebec Secession Reference”. And if there is word on which the court insists, it is certainly the word clarity.

Clarity is the basis of any democratic process. People must be able to understand the impact and the consequences of their action when they express their will. As for governments, they must be sure of the mandate given to them. Therefore, it is important that the issues at stake in a referendum be clear to everyone.

As the court reminded us, it is the role of political actors to ensure this requirement for clarity is met.

We are being criticized for allegedly interfering in the referendum process of the PQ government. On this side of the House, we far prefer no referendum be held since this sort of debate simply sets people against one another.

However, the PQ government keeps repeating, through Premier Bouchard and the minister of Canadian intergovernmental affairs, Joseph Facal, that such a referendum will be held during the present term. Mr. Facal, my colleague in Laval, was very clear in his remarks, and I quote:

In my mind, there is positively no doubt. I work every day and with every ounce of energy to have the winning referendum on sovereignty held in this term.

Accordingly, if a referendum on sovereignty were to be held, we think the question to be asked must be clear and that Canada cannot be broken up without a clear majority of the people of a province choosing secession, expressing clearly its desire for the province to cease being a part of Canada. This is self-evident.

I would like to spend a little time on the need for a clear question. If the justices of the supreme court insisted on this so much, they had a reason for doing so. They understood that the break-up of a democratic country is a matter of the utmost gravity, as the bill states, that a country must not be broken up in confusion. The vote must faithfully reflect the will of the voters to have their province cease to be a part of Canada.

• (1605)

I would like to read the following question:

The Government of Québec has made public its proposal to negotiate a new agreement with the rest of Canada, based on the equality of nations; this agreement would enable Québec to acquire the exclusive power to make its laws, levy its taxes and establish relations abroad—in other words, sovereignty—and at the same time, to maintain with Canada an economic association including a common currency; no change in political status resulting from these negotiations will be effected without approval by the people through another referendum; on these terms,—

And here comes the question, at last.

*Supply*

—do you give the Government of Québec the mandate to negotiate the proposed agreement between Québec and Canada?

All of my colleagues will recognize that as the 1980 referendum question. I do not believe that everyone will acknowledge that it was very clear.

As for the 1995 question, it read as follows:

Do you agree that Québec should become sovereign, after having made a formal offer to Canada for a new economic and political partnership, within the scope of the bill respecting the future of Québec and of the agreement signed on June 12, 1995?

That one was the question with the partnership project, which Mr. Bouchard was later to describe as a skeleton.

As in 1980, the 1995 question was not clear, and there is one very convincing way to prove it.

A poll carried out just before the October 30, 1995 referendum indicated that 80% of Quebecers proposing to vote yes believed that, if the yes side were to win, Quebec would continue to use the Canadian dollar; close to 80% believed that economic ties with Canada would remain unchanged; 50% believed that they would continue to use Canada passports; and 25% believed that Quebec would continue to elect members of the Canadian Parliament. Moreover, another poll informed us that nearly one backer of the yes in five believed that a sovereign Quebec could remain a province of Canada.

So much for the truth on the so-called clarity of the 1995 question. Let me remind those who might still not be convinced of the ambiguity of that referendum process of a statement made by Jacques Parizeau in an open letter published last year in the daily *Le Devoir*. Mr. Parizeau wrote:

We have often been told that the 1995 question was not clear. It is true, as I often pointed out, that the question I would have wanted to ask was: Do you want Quebec to become a sovereign (or independent) country as of—?

One wonders why Mr. Parizeau did not want to be so direct when he was Premier of Quebec and leader of the yes side. But this is not an issue I want to discuss today.

However, Mr. Parizeau's successor provided us with an interesting element of answer. On October 19, Lucien Bouchard suggested that the notion of partnership was supported by 7% or 8% more people and that, therefore, one should think twice before taking a more radical stance. They are not being honest and direct when they play with words like that in order to get Quebecers to agree to achieve independence, which they have not agreed to twice already.

Our government has a duty not to undertake any negotiations that might lead to the separation of a province, unless the voters of that province clearly and democratically state that they want their province to secede from Canada.

The separatists usually refute our objections regarding the lack of clarity of the referendum questions by saying that we think Quebecers are unable to understand what is at stake. This is a rather dramatic display of cynicism and contempt. Let me simply say, in response to that groundless accusation, that it is because we respect Quebecers and the citizens of all the provinces that we want to ensure that any referendum question put to them is clear and void of any ambiguity.

Mr. Speaker, for all these reasons, I am opposed to the motion tabled by the Bloc Québécois leader.

• (1610)

**Mr. René Canuel (Matapédia—Matane, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, when my colleague talks about the referendum question and about Mr. Parizeau, she is insulting me and she is insulting the people of Quebec. If somebody has ever been clear in his life, it is Mr. Parizeau. And I pay tribute to him.

Getting back to the 1980 question, Mr. Trudeau, then Prime Minister of Canada, had told Mr. Chrétien a week earlier “If we win the referendum, it is fine. If we loose, I will ask all the ministers from Quebec to resign”. That is what Trudeau said one week before the referendum. This means that, for him, the question was very clear.

Now they want to subdue Quebec. Once again, they want to quash us. My colleague talks about clarity; I want to ask her a question and I hope that she can answer very clearly.

Will she recognize a result of 50% plus one? Because this is how it works in a democracy. If she is not prepared to recognize 50% plus one, what would be the required percentage then?

**Ms. Raymonde Folco:** Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to reply to the comments made by the hon. member for Matapédia—Matane.

First of all, I will answer a question that he did not ask, but that is still a question for me. He said he was insulted by the comments I made about Mr. Parizeau. In reply to that, I say that I was only quoting the exact words the former Quebec Premier had used, as reported in *Le Devoir*.

If the hon. member is so insulted by what the former Prime Minister of Canada, I would ask him this: Why did the Parti Québécois ask for Mr. Parizeau's resignation immediately following the referendum? Because Mr. Parizeau had insulted Quebecers.

[English]

**Mr. Gilles Bernier (Tobique—Mactaquac, PC):** Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask the member opposite a question. Let us say, for the sake of it, that Quebec holds another referendum with a clear question, and with a clear majority Quebec wins. Then we would have to go through secession.

Who would negotiate for Canada? Before the members stands, I want to remind her of something. The Prime Minister, at least 10 of his cabinet ministers and all of the MPs who come from Quebec, under the Geneva Convention, the United Nations and international law are not bound by law to negotiate for Canada.

Who would negotiate for Canada then?

[*Translation*]

**Ms. Raymonde Folco:** Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to answer that question. First of all, I apologize for answering in French, but it is my mother tongue. I can express myself much better in French.

**Mr. Pierre de Savoye:** Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. Since when do we have to apologize for speaking French in this House? How totally colonized.

**The Deputy Speaker:** That is not a point of order. The hon. member may say what she wants.

**Ms. Raymonde Folco:** Mr. Speaker, I am going to answer the question. It is because I respect both official languages, and my hon. colleague spoke to me in the other official language, and I feel I have a responsibility, in order to respect both languages, to answer him in his language. Sadly, I do not speak that language well enough.

That being said, let us come back to the question. My hon. colleague asked the question “If Quebec wins”. For my part, I say that, in 1995, when Quebecers said that they wanted to stay within the Canadian Confederation, Quebec won. That is what happens when Quebec wins.

Now, I would like to answer the first question of my hon. colleague on figures. I would like to mention Quebec’s caisses populaires.

• (1615)

Nothing is more important for Quebecers, men and women, than the caisses populaires. It is a success story for Quebec. The caisses populaires, which are now merging need, in order to merge, not 50% plus one, but 65% and more.

**Mr. René Laurin:** Who will negotiate?

**Ms. Raymonde Folco:** This is further evidence of the fact that even among Quebecers, in all activities, 50% plus one is unacceptable.

**Mr. Rahim Jaffer (Edmonton—Strathcona, Ref.):** Mr. Speaker, I wish to split my time with my colleague for South Surrey—White Rock—Langley.

First, I would like to read the motion proposed today by the Bloc Quebecois. This motion says—

*Supply*

**The Deputy Speaker:** Order, please. We can hardly hear the hon. member who has the floor. I hope that all the members will remain quiet during the speech by the hon. member for Edmonton—Strathcona, to whom I am giving the floor once again.

**Mr. Rahim Jaffer:** Thank you, Mr. Speaker.

This motion says:

That this House instruct the Legislative Committee on Bill C-20, an Act to give effect to the requirement for clarity as set out in the opinion of the Supreme Court of Canada in the Quebec secession Reference, to hold public hearings in all regions of Quebec and Canada so as to hear as many witnesses having an interest in the Bill as possible, that the hearings be broadcast and that the Committee be given sufficient resources to hold such hearings, all in accordance with the rules and practices of the House.

Contrary to Bill C-20, the motion proposed by the Bloc today is very clear.

[*English*]

I would like to talk about some of the comments we heard earlier from the hon. parliamentary secretary to the minister. He spoke quite eloquently and quite passionately about his concern about what the law addressed when it came to pulling the country apart. He felt that his party was standing in the House defending democracy, while the Bloc on the other hand was not, and in the process of dealing with this law was adding clarity to something he felt was very important.

However on reading this motion it seems that the Bloc is very concerned about pushing ahead with the idea of democracy in the House and extending it to a very important part of the committee procedure of the House of Commons.

One of the fears many of us have had in dealing with this important legislation, as my hon. colleague mentioned, is that we are not giving enough time to deal with an issue that affects all of us in Canada, no matter what the result would be of a potential referendum to secede from the country.

Dealing with the issue does not only apply to one region. My colleagues in the Bloc have said that as well. If the law sets a precedent we know that in the future there could be other regions of the country that may well go through the same process of referendums to secede from the country. I hope not, but in the event that it happens we need to hear from Canadians across the country about what they might feel should be added to the law or what they might feel is missing from the law.

How can we get as many Canadians as possible involved in this issue which, as my colleague mentioned, is one of the most important issues that we face in the country? In speaking passionately about the hon. member’s feelings for democracy and about democracy in this place, I was very shocked to hear him disagree with the motion and say that the committee should not be allowed to travel.

*Supply*

I sat on the committee with two of my colleagues in the official opposition. So far we have unfortunately seen a very disorganized committee. We have seen the committee propose to hear from 45 witnesses in the span of a week. Because of the time allowed to notify the witnesses to come to Ottawa, some of them will not have a chance to make it. How is that participation in democracy? How is that including Canadians from across the country?

• (1620)

If the hon. member were serious about his comments on democracy and serious about his love for this country, he would not be scared to have Canadians from coast to coast join in debating a particular law as I aforementioned that is of paramount importance to almost all Canadians. This is the irony of the government.

We heard from the parliamentary secretary his belief in democracy and his commitment to democracy. We have seen in the House the most time allocation motions put forward by any government in our history. We have had restrictions on debate. We have had restrictions on trying to allow democracy to unfold in the country. The government is at the root of the problem.

The parliamentary secretary flatly rejects the idea of putting forward a simple motion on an issue that is so important to Canadians, that of giving the committee the ability to travel and hear from Canadians across the country. Where is his commitment to democracy?

As members know, the root of the motion today comes from Bill C-20 which is supposed to add clarity to the idea of a question being formed on the issue of a referendum but also clarity surrounding majority as it pertains to a referendum. When I talk to my colleagues across the country I know many of them feel they would like to see some issues addressed in the bill that have not been addressed thus far.

We have continuously raised one of these issues. My colleague, the parliamentary secretary, correctly pointed out that the official opposition wants to know what will constitute a clear majority in the bill. We have proposed our solution. We have discussed the idea of 50 plus one, a standard in democracy that is accepted around the world in other modern democracies. We know there are some concerns in that regard.

We would like the government to make clear where it plans to go on the important question of what it will respect in the event of a referendum vote. Will it change the bar halfway through the game? Will it alienate various Canadians in the process of making a decision on whether they want to stay in this country? These are important questions to which we still have no answers. There is not the clarity we would like to see in this bill.

As my hon. colleague from Macleod has said, we support the bill in principle. The Reform Party has been calling for clarity surrounding this issue far longer than the government. We would like to see these things outlined clearly. We hope the committee process will be able to deal with some amendments to the bill.

**An hon. member:** What committee?

**Mr. Rahim Jaffer:** Exactly. As my colleague from the Bloc has just said, what committee?

We will rush through this procedure. There has not been a time restriction put on the committee as yet, but half the 45 witnesses scheduled have not appeared. I am hoping the rest will be given the time allowed to come here. How are we to deal with the issue seriously? How are we to include the amendments to the bill required to make it satisfactory to the rest of Canadians?

I stress once again that if the committee were allowed to travel as the Bloc is proposing, if it were allowed to go to different parts of the country, we would get a different view from Canadians of what they would like to see the government show in the area of leadership when it comes to national unity.

I know the government is afraid to start discussing these options because it has shown no leadership when it comes to vision, when it comes to how to make the country work better. We in the official opposition have talked about it quite clearly. We have put forward what we feel Canada should do in order to make it work better. Our proposals have been outlined in the new Canada Act. We are not afraid to talk about this and put forward positive solutions to make this federation work better.

It seems to me that the government is satisfied with status quo federalism which most Canadians have rejected time and time again. Canadians want more from their government. They want leadership. They want to see their country put aside alienation and differences and build on the strengths of diversity, the strengths the official opposition has outlined in the new Canada Act on how we can make our federation work better.

• (1625)

Travelling across the country as I try to do I hear from Canadians. I hear they would like to see more leadership from the government. That leadership could start with democracy in this place and democracy at the committee level.

From the motion put forward by the Bloc today, I hope the government will take seriously the idea of democracy in the committee, the idea of Canadians from across the country taking part in such an important issue, and give the opportunity for the committee to do its work in a pertinent fashion.

I will leave those comments with the government. If as the parliamentary secretary said it is committed to democracy, I hope it

*Supply*

will consider them. We on the opposition side support the effort to try to make the work of the committee more democratic.

**Mr. Reg Alcock (Parliamentary Secretary to President of the Queen's Privy Council for Canada and Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for his comments. Let us see what we can do. The purpose of this place is to debate ideas. The purpose of this process is to try to come to a common understanding of how we might build better legislation.

The member raised the question that his party raised. Is 50 plus one a sufficient majority on which to make this decision? Three witnesses came before committee this morning, not the minister but constitutional experts from universities in Quebec, who argued very eloquently on that question. The member was there and listened to the arguments put forward on why 50 plus one was not enough. Is the member able to hear that, or does he feel he must support the first position put forward by his party?

**Mr. Rahim Jaffer:** Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for his question. As he has correctly identified, we have only heard from three witnesses on this committee. We have not had the chance to hear any opposing views. For all that we could put on the record, maybe those witnesses were from the government side.

If we had the chance to invoke democracy as I talked about in this place and have the committee travel to different parts of the country, maybe then the hon. member would hear a different story from Canadians. The fact of the matter is that many Canadians across the country actually endorse the position of the official opposition and the idea of 50 plus one.

I encourage the member to open his eyes and encourage democracy to work and Canadians to speak out. Maybe he will hear the same message.

**Mr. Daniel Turp (Beauharnois—Salaberry, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, I am happy to speak in English in the House. I do not need to excuse myself. As a sovereigntist it is useful to speak English for people who want a partnership with Canada. I truly believe that will happen in the near future when Quebecers choose to opt for sovereignty.

My question to my colleague is to some extent a question I wanted to put to the parliamentary secretary. We understand now that there are supposed to be 45 witnesses. That is the quota that was given to our party. This is unprecedented in the history of parliamentary democracy in the House of Commons.

Apparently only 23 witnesses have accepted. The debate is supposed to last until next Tuesday. Does my hon. colleague from Edmonton—Strathcona believe the work of the committee should be prolonged to hear at least those 45 witnesses and time should be allocated to hear more people? Does he believe that the Liberal

Party and the government want something like this to happen and want us to hear more witnesses?

**Mr. Rahim Jaffer:** Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague from the Bloc for his question. To answer it very quickly, I do not believe the government is committed to hearing more witnesses or allowing this process to go forward. It is trying to rush it through. It is trying to rush the amount of witnesses through the committee.

Even though the ceiling as the hon. member has correctly mentioned is 45 witnesses, we do not even know if we will get through those witnesses or if we will be able to replace those who, as I mentioned earlier, were not given proper notice in time to be able to come here.

● (1630)

I would love to have some of the other provincial representatives give their thoughts or give Canadians from different organizations across the country the chance to be heard on this legislation. For many of them it is tough to come to Ottawa on such short notice. That is why we should expand the ability of the committee to do better work and more work and to allow it to travel to hear from Canadians across the country.

It is a simple request. If the hon. parliamentary secretary were serious about his demands for democracy and commitment to the country, perhaps he would not find it so difficult to expand that view of the committee.

**Mr. Gilles Bernier (Tobique—Mactaquac, PC):** Mr. Speaker, my question for the member from the Reform Party will be brief.

As I just heard, the member is not happy with the way the committee work is going on the clarity bill. He also stated that he is not happy with any majority higher than 50% plus one. I guess he believes in a majority of 50% plus one. If that means that the hon. member has problems with half of the bill, why is he supporting the bill?

**Mr. Rahim Jaffer:** Mr. Speaker, I made it clear during my speech that in principle we are supporting the bill. We are hoping that with responsible motions such as this Bloc motion the government will listen and actually put some democratic principles into the committee so that we can improve the legislation. We are hoping that it will happen.

For now I have made it clear and the opposition has made it clear that 50% plus one is a standard of democracy that we are willing to respect. Let us challenge that and see what happens in the committee.

**Ms. Val Meredith (South Surrey—White Rock—Langley, Ref.):** Mr. Speaker, perhaps the parliamentary secretary who is in

*Supply*

charge of the process on the clarity bill has heard the comment and realizes the difficult position the government has put its allies in. Here we are trying to support the government in principle because we feel that clarity on this issue is required, yet the Liberal members carry on in committee in a fashion I have not seen in the seven years I have been in the House.

I have sat on six different committees and I have never seen the type of railroading that I saw when we tried to establish the principles upon which the committee would operate. The official opposition proposed a motion requesting travel. Knowing the importance of the issue and the inability of Canadians to take part in that discussion other than through the committee process, we thought it was important that the committee that has been established to look at Bill C-20 travel across the country to all regions to allow Canadians to participate in this most important debate.

For the people who are watching these proceedings, the Liberal members of the committee defeated that motion. They felt that they did not want to travel to bring this issue before Canadians. I am not sure what the Liberal members are concerned about. I am not sure what they are afraid of.

I think they owe it to Canadians to open this discussion because it concerns each and every one of us. For those who think this is only an issue between one province and the federal government, they are mistaken. This issue concerns every single Canadian. The government has put the official opposition and others who want to support it in a very difficult position by treating the committee with such disrespect.

I get the feeling that the government is reacting. We questioned the timing of Bill C-20. It appears to me even more so after the committee hearing that the government is knee-jerk reacting to a situation and for its own agenda it chose to pick this point in time to throw the bill on the table, limit discussion and hope it quickly gets through and no one will even notice it. It is very similar to the knee-jerk reaction the government had after the 1995 referendum.

• (1635)

Does anyone in the House remember the government's Motion No. 26? No, because it zipped through here so quickly. It is the one that recognized distinct society. How about Bill C-110? Does anyone here remember that bill? No, because it zipped through the House so quickly. It is the one that gave regional areas in the country a veto. Did Canadians get a chance to debate, to discuss, to give any attention to those issues? Absolutely not. There was not even a committee formed to discuss those very important issues.

Here we are one more time. The government is throwing in a bill at an inappropriate time to talk about an issue that it does not want to talk about with anybody other than a handful of its own people who agree with it. Canadians deserve more than that. Canadians deserve something that is much better and something that is much more democratic.

We agree with the principle and the concept of the bill. As has been said by my hon. colleagues, the official opposition brought up the issue of clarity five years ago, the need to be clear about what it means to Canada to have one of its provinces secede. We brought up the issue that there has to be clarity on what numbers are required. Whether it is 50% plus one, 65% or 75%, we have to be very clear about what the measurement is. Does the bill do it? Not really. It does not outline what a clear question is going to be and it certainly does not clearly outline what number is required.

Government members seem to take exception when we argue that 50% plus one is the accepted line. There have been two referendums on the separation of Quebec and on both occasions it was 50% plus one.

I remind the government that if the Liberals have a problem with 50% plus one, they should ask the person who wrote the Constitution Act, 1982, the repatriation of the BNA act, an individual who happens to have sat on that side of the House, why the number was not changed when there was an opportunity to do so. If 50% plus one is not acceptable, why did they not change it when they had the opportunity to do so? Why did they not state the number that would be required? The constitution is silent on this issue. There is no mention of any other number. The accepted majority around the world is 50% plus one. If the government does not like that, then it should have taken the opportunity to change it when it had the chance in 1982.

I want to go back to the issue of travelling and communicating with Canadians. I had the opportunity to participate in the British Columbia unity debate and the British Columbia unity panel. The Government of British Columbia took it upon itself when we were dealing with the Calgary declaration, the question of unity and of trying to keep the country together, to communicate with the people of its province. It did not worry about time. It did not worry about costs. It worried about communicating with the people so that the people understood what the issues were and they had a chance to give their opinion.

I took part in that and travelled to every corner of British Columbia. I listened to the people of British Columbia, not the politicians and the business community but a collection of all of those people. It gave me a much greater understanding of what being a Canadian means to each and every one of us and how important that issue is to Canadians.

We do a great disservice when we eliminate Canadians from the process that is happening today. We do not gain anything by excluding Canadians from the dialogue that is taking place. I understand even the people who are most interested in it cannot gather themselves quickly enough to appear before the committee. It is understandable when they are given one day, 24 hours notice.

*Supply*

• (1640)

This is not the kind of subject matter on which somebody can get a phone call the night before to appear before a committee the next morning. How do we expect the Canadian public to participate in this process if the people who are most interested in it cannot be prepared to speak?

I think the government has a hidden agenda and I am not sure what it is. I am not sure why the Liberals are afraid to talk to Canadians on this issue. If they really want support and do not want to face another 1995 situation where they are on one side and everybody else is on the other, if they lose the opportunity to have this communication with Canadians and understand what Canadians are feeling, then they are not going to be ready when the time comes.

The government owes it to Canadians to open up the committee process to travel and hear what Canadians have to say and how they feel. The government owes it to Canadians to give it the time that is required. I am not sure why the Liberals think it has to be finished in seven days. They sat on it for two months. This bill was introduced two months ago and a good deal of travel could have been done in that period of time. I do not know why they think they have only seven days to get it through the House. The government has used time allocation to limit debate in the House and now the committee is being shut down. Limitations are being put on the committee. I have been on six different committees and I have never seen this kind of abuse of democracy and parliamentary process in my life.

[*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 Davenport, Fisheries; the hon. member for Dewdney—Alouette, Taxation.

[*English*]

**Mr. Dennis J. Mills (Broadview—Greenwood, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I had not intended to react or comment on today's debate but I have been hearing so much rubbish I want to be on the record.

Canadians should be told the reality which is that we have been debating this issue for 40 years. In the years I have been here we have been doing nothing but accommodating the separatists. We have bent over backward and for the life of me I cannot figure out why the Reform Party wants to continue this debate. Canadians are fed up with this debate. This debate with the separatists has cost this country billions of dollars. It has affected our exchange. It has affected investment.

**An hon. member:** This is a democracy.

**An hon. member:** You do not know what that word means.

**Mr. Dennis J. Mills:** Mr. Speaker, this is a democracy and I am not finished. No one interrupted the separatists all afternoon but when I get up to remind Canadians that we have been debating this, we have had two referendums, the Reform Party will not let me speak. This is not fair.

Does the member not think debating this issue for 40 years is a long enough debate? It is time to bury it, put it to bed and get on with building Canada.

**Ms. Val Meredith:** Mr. Speaker, the only amazing thing I have heard from the member across the way is that if he thinks the debate that has been going on for 40 years is going to end, then I do not know what he is smoking. The bill does not clarify anything. If the member has been debating it for 40 years, then why can he or the government not come up with the number that is required to pass this legislation? After 40 years what is the magic number? What is the number?

• (1645)

**Mr. Peter Adams:** Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. I could not hear a word that the member for Broadview—Greenwood was saying. I would urge you to give him additional time. Even with the microphones I could not hear what he was saying.

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. McClelland):** I appreciate the intervention by the hon. member for Peterborough, but I assure the hon. member for Broadview—Greenwood that I could hear every single word that was said. I could also hear every bit of emotion that went into it.

This is a house for debate. Sometimes it gets a little rough, but provided it is within the rules there is no problem.

**Mr. Dennis J. Mills:** Mr. Speaker, I have every bit as much right to speak in the House as members of the Bloc Québécois. In the six years I have been here listening to them—and I have been here 12 years—I have never interrupted a Bloc Québécois speaker. I feel that they are impinging upon my opportunity to make my remarks.

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. McClelland):** With respect to the hon. member for Broadview—Greenwood, that is certainly a question of debate.

The member for South Surrey—White Rock—Langley has been called away but I will recognize the hon. member for Tobique—Mactaquac on a question or comment.

**Mr. Gilles Bernier (Tobique—Mactaquac, PC):** Mr. Speaker, it is not that I want to criticize, but Reform members have spoken all day. They say that they do not agree with a majority higher than 50% plus one. The member who spoke a while ago said that there is no clarity about this question. They said that they were not satisfied with the amount of work that has gone on in committee. There is nothing in this bill that they are satisfied with.

*Supply*

Why is the Reform Party supporting a bill that it does not like? It is as simple as that. It is not a matter of principle; it is a matter of values.

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. McClelland):** The member for Tobique—Mactaquac got the last word in that exchange. Resuming debate, the hon. member for Wentworth—Burlington.

**Mr. John Bryden (Wentworth—Burlington, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to see that there are so many Bloquistes and Reformists in the Commons. I am going to give a very good reason why the Reform Party should reject this motion and I hope to give a very good reason—

**Mr. Howard Hilstrom:** Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. The present member speaking from the government side and the previous member from the Progressive Conservatives have referred to the number of individuals in the House of Commons. I do not believe that is in keeping with the rules.

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. McClelland):** The member for Wentworth—Burlington referred to the general House, which is done often, without referring to a specific member. The member for Tobique—Mactaquac, at the Chair's invitation, because the member was called away, had the floor to express his comments. Both were in order.

**Mr. John Bryden:** Mr. Speaker, in fact I congratulated both parties, the Reform and the Bloc Quebecois, on having so many members in the House.

I do not think that anyone in the House can be a more committed federalist than I am. I very much appreciate the contribution that Bloc Quebecois members have made in the Chamber over the years that I have known them. Nevertheless, I am very much a federalist.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to take you back to 1995 and the so-called referendum crisis, from our side, and what occurred at that time leading up to that question, to the actual referendum. We in the backbenches of the Liberal Party were assured that it looked as though it would be an easy win for the no side, which was the federalist side. What happened was, it was a very narrow, close race. Members will remember that there was a margin of only 50,000 votes on the no side that rejected the proposed question put by the Parti Quebecois.

• (1650)

In the aftermath—and I tell this to my Bloc colleagues—in the Liberal caucus of which I was a part, we were in shock. We were absolutely devastated because it appeared that we had nearly lost our side. No matter what the Bloc says, it was a terribly emotional experience to feel that we may have lost our country based on what turned out to be a terribly ambiguous question, from my point of

view. It turned out to be a very narrow margin. Indeed, being 50% plus one, we could have lost the entire country.

I remind members, just in passing, of the actual text of that question. That question which we agonized over read: "Do you agree that Quebec should become sovereign after having made a formal offer to Canada for a new economic and political partnership within the scope of the bill respecting the future of Quebec and of the agreement signed on June 12, 1995?"

We were appalled that our government could have taken us that close to the abyss without ensuring that a clearer question, a real question, had been on the table. In caucus government members constantly talked about how narrow an experience it had been for Canada and how Canada would have had to negotiate and if we had lost by a margin of 60,000 votes Canada would have had to negotiate the separation of Quebec.

I got up in my national caucus and I said in front of the Prime Minister "Do not talk about Canada having to negotiate on a question like this", if we had lost that referendum, "talk about the government having to negotiate because", I said in national caucus at that time, "if my government ever lost a referendum on such an unclear question, the first thing that would happen is there would be a vote of confidence", because I would never agree, as a Canadian, as an MP, to negotiate the breakup of a country based on such an unclear question. There would have been a vote of confidence. We could not have accepted it. There would have been a free vote.

I was very much behind getting a clear question and very much behind the clarity bill as we see it now, because what the clarity bill does, what it simply does, is it binds future governments to be responsible for ensuring that before they even begin negotiating they have to consult parliament and parliament has to decide whether the question is clear. The reason I believe my Bloc Quebecois colleagues should support Bill C-20 is because, in the end, if there ever were a clear question that was agreed upon by this parliament, I, in the interests of civil society, would have to go along with negotiations. But so long as there is an unclear question I could never abide by it. I would always be opposed.

We have to have a clear question. We have to have a majority that I, as a federalist, accept.

The problem became this. As it was realized in the years that followed, at least realized by some on the back bench, the real problem was not with the federal Liberals, because by that time it was very clear in our caucus that it had to be a clear question and it had to be a decent or clear majority. What became clear was that if in the event the Conservatives came to power or the Reform Party came to power, we know that Joe Clark would have accepted an unclear question and begun negotiations and we know from his own mouth that the Leader of the Opposition would accept a thin majority and carry on to negotiations to break up the country. The question is how to confine future governments that are willing to trade off this great nation on such a thin margin; how to confine them to the will of parliament.

*Supply*

Bill C-20 does that. It does not set conditions on the questions. It does not set conditions on the majority. What it says simply in clause 1(6) and clause 2(4) is that before any of the governments of the future can negotiate the breakup of the this country parliament has to approve by free vote—one vote, one MP—the nature of the question and the nature of the majority.

It is clearly a situation where it is parliament restraining the power of future governments. This issue is between parliament and governments. It is not between the provinces. It is not between all the special interest groups out there.

• (1655)

This is why, if I had had my way, I would not have had witnesses before the committee at all. There was no need to have witnesses, because this is between the entire 301 MPs and future governments of this land.

I think the government was right in putting it to a legislative committee, because clearly there was no other standing committee that could possibly have the jurisdiction over a question like this. It cannot be sent to government operations, the justice committee, or any other committee. There is only one committee, and it had to be a committee of these MPs, and so it is before that committee now.

I cannot understand why Reform Party members are standing up and saying “We have to bring in the provinces. We have to bring in all these special interests groups”, when this is entirely an issue, and I stress this, between the House of Commons, all the MPs assembled, and the government of the future.

I think that if ever the day comes, and I hope it never does come, that the Bloc Quebecois can mobilize enough support in the House with a free vote on a question that it thinks contributes to secession, I would have to support it, but only if it is a clear question, and I have a free vote, and I can act on behalf of the Canadians I represent.

[*Translation*]

**Mrs. Suzanne Tremblay (Rimouski—Mitis, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for his presentation, but there are a few gaps in his knowledge.

First of all, our Canada began in 1534, and his in 1867. Ours became Quebec. That is what they have trouble understanding. That is what they have trouble getting into their heads. He tells us that the caucus was, as he said in English, “shocked”. Shocked indeed, they ought to have woken up earlier, because on the eve of the referendum, the Prime Minister had said that the question was clear and that it was irreversible. They did not have enough brains among the bunch of them to realize that the question was clear.

They woke up the morning after the referendum saying “Oops, we nearly lost”. The Prime Minister had convinced them “Just wash your hands of it, and I’ll deal with it”. They still trust that

fellow today, they still believe that his bill is going to get us somewhere. It will, into a dead end, into a confrontation. Or we will go.

As I have already said this morning: We are biding our time, but our day will come.

[*English*]

**Mr. John Bryden:** Mr. Speaker, a perfect example of the tragedy of the separatists is that they are always looking to the past.

I will say, as a federalist, and I think for the majority of Quebecers, we look to the future.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Richard Marceau (Charlesbourg, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, I do not want to dwell too much on the past. However, I find it rather strange to hear about clarity in procedure and respect for the rules coming from a member who very recently altered a bill after a number of members in this House had signed it. It is a bit strange. This is not what I call very democratic.

When people say the 1995 question was not clear, they are dead wrong. The concept of Quebec’s independence, in its modern form, started in 1960 with the RIN. The Parti Quebecois was created in 1968. I was born in 1970. Quebec’s sovereignty was being debated well before my time. And people believe that Quebecers, whether they voted yes or not, do not know what we are talking about. This shows a lack of respect. This shows arrogance towards all Quebecers, the 93% who voted in the 1995 referendum, whether they voted yes or no.

My question is very simple. Does the member, who knows how things works and who knows full well that Liberal backbenchers have no power, not believe that giving the federal parliament, this House, the authority to determine what is clear and what is not means that parliament will decide? In other words, the Liberal majority will decide.

• (1700)

If it is the Liberal majority, it means the Liberal government. If it is the Liberal government, it means the Prime Minister’s inner circle. If it is the inner circle, it means the Prime Minister himself.

Does he not believe that it means leaving a majority decision by Quebecers at the mercy of the whims of one man, the Prime Minister? Is this not the reverse of democracy?

[*English*]

**Mr. John Bryden:** But there is a problem with clarity, Mr. Speaker. I distinctly said that what is happening here is we are taking the issue of the clarity of the question away from government and giving it to every member of the House of Commons, everyone, the Bloc Quebecois included. It is a decision for all MPs.

*Supply*

I can tell you, Mr. Speaker, I will not be confined by party discipline on an issue of whether a question or a majority is enough to break up the country. One of the reasons why I am afraid of the Conservative Party and I am afraid of the Reform Party in the future is that if they ever did acquire power I would be afraid that they would have enough party discipline in order to accept a question that was unacceptable.

This way future governments will be required to undertake a free vote in this parliament before any government can negotiate separation.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Stéphane Bergeron:** Mr. Speaker, on a point of order. I am sure my colleagues would be willing to give their unanimous consent so my colleague can ask a question to the eloquent Liberal member, who showed us in spectacular fashion that federalism is leading us nowhere.

[*English*]

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. McClelland):** Does the House give unanimous consent to extend time for three minutes to provide for one more question?

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Paul Crête (Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup—Témiscouata—Les Basques, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my colleagues for allowing me to ask a question.

Yesterday morning, I was in Sept-Îles, in Quebec. I could have been in Rivière-du-Loup, or Rimouski, or elsewhere. Since the member would like so much to understand what is going on, I would like to ask him why he does not tell the House that it would be interesting if the committee could travel to listen to what Quebecers have to say.

I would like him to come and listen to what Quebecers have to say when they are being told that a question that basically focuses on a mandate to negotiate will not be allowed. I would also like him to come and listen to what Quebecers have to say when they read in the bill that a question that envisages economic or political arrangements with Canada will not be allowed either.

Does the member realize that this bill belittles the Quebec National Assembly, the only parliament where Quebecers have a majority and always will?

[*English*]

**Mr. John Bryden:** I would actually submit that clause 3 of the bill is a hollow clause. It really does not commit the government to do anything other than to consult, which would happen normally anyway.

The bottom line of this whole issue, and the reason I do not think we have to seek witnesses outside the House, is that we are really discussing an internal parliamentary democracy issue. The reason I love this bill actually is that it is one of the few instances where parliament has actually seized control and is eliminating the power of the executive.

One of the terrible things that has occurred over the years and I think got us into a lot of trouble with the Charlottetown accord, the Mulroney years and even the Trudeau years, is that the executive branch of government, the Prime Minister and his cabinet, had too much power. Now we have an instance where parliament is actually taking some of that power back. I think it is a very positive thing.

I do not think it is impossible for the Bloc Québécois to rally more sovereignty support, perhaps not separatism support, but sovereignty support. We see the Reform Party in the House today that is very much in favour of decentralization and more power to the provinces. We know that has been the tradition of the Conservatives for a very long time. We also see that the Conservatives are in fact supporting the Bloc Québécois on this particular issue.

So theoretically it is possible in this place for us as MPs on all sides of the House to change the nature of the country. But it is an internal problem. It exists in this House. It does not exist in the provinces. It exists between all MPs versus, in many instances, the government.

• (1705)

**Mr. Gilles Bernier:** Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. I was one of the first to stand up during the question and answer period but I was not given a chance to ask a question. If I could have the unanimous consent of the House, I would like to ask the member a question.

**The Acting Speaker (Mr. McClelland):** I will ask for the unanimous consent of the House. However, I want the hon. member for Tobique—Mactaquac to know that I did see him, but, if he will remember, the speaker before the member was recognized for a question. We win some and we lose some and that one you lost.

I will put the question. Does the hon. member for Tobique—Mactaquac have unanimous consent?

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

**Some hon. members:** No.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Yvon Charbonneau (Anjou—Rivière-des-Prairies, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I would like to speak to this debate at this point. As we can see and hear, it is at the request of the Bloc Québécois as well as of my constituents.

This is a rather painful debate, because it is based ultimately on the assumption of a desire by Quebec to separate and the negoti-

ations that could follow. It is very painful because, in my opinion, it would be a step backwards for Canada and Quebec. It would also plunge the people of Quebec and Canada into problems we have no idea how to resolve. It is also very painful because the people of Quebec are less than ever interested in the option of the people opposite.

After the remarks made in the fall by the Quebec Premier and by Minister Facal, who were continuously threatening to hold a referendum during their current mandate, our government has decided to bring the matter out in the open. Even though it is painful, even though this time could be given to other priorities, this is a debate that was forced on us and one that had to be held because it is useful for everyone now.

This morning, I heard the leader of the Bloc Québécois setting himself up as the sole champion of Quebecers, saying “Quebec does not want Bill C-20”. He was talking about Quebec, its separation, and so on.

I would remind the Bloc Québécois that it is an election and even a referendum behind. In Anjou—Rivière-des-Prairies, the Bloc Québécois was defeated in the latest election by 7,600 votes. This was the case in Bourassa, in the northeastern part of the island of Montreal, as well.

The people of the Bloc Québécois tend to say “Yes, but there are the English. You were elected where there are anglophones”. For them, votes are not equivalent in ridings if there are a lot of allophones or anglophones. In both Bourassa and Anjou—Rivière-des-Prairies, there cannot be more than 1,000 people of anglophone origin.

In Mercier and Hochelaga—Maisonnette, neighbouring ridings, Bloc Québécois members were elected, but with a majority of 10,000 votes fewer than before. In Québec, the Bloc Québécois had 500,000 votes fewer than last time.

I would also point out that the referendum was in 1995. As the member for Anjou—Rivière-des-Prairies—

**Mr. Réal Ménard:** Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. With due respect to my colleague, when he said I had 10,000 fewer votes than previously, he lied.

**The Deputy Speaker:** The hon. member may have been mistaken. If this is the case, this is not a point of order, this is a point of debate.

**Mr. Yvon Charbonneau:** It was 10,000 fewer votes, Mr. Speaker.

**Mr. Paul Crête:** Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order.

If the member had the wrong numbers he should withdraw his words now. If not—

### Supply

**The Deputy Speaker:** Naturally this is only debate. The hon. member for Anjou—Rivière-des-Prairies.

• (1710)

**Mr. Yvon Charbonneau:** Mr. Speaker, there were 10,000 fewer votes in both ridings next to mine and 500,000 fewer votes across Quebec. Liberal members from Quebec can represent those Quebecers who do not want a referendum and do not want sovereignty.

The Bloc Québécois is talking about a travelling committee. If we were cynical, we would have accepted its proposal. We would have had the pleasure of seeing the Parizists, the Bouchardists, the Liséists, the Monières, the Bellefeuilles—

**An hon. member:** Democrats.

**Mr. Yvon Charbonneau:** The leader of the Parti Québécois had an option. Now, these people have options and we could have seen them outline their contradictory options.

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

**Mr. Yvon Charbonneau:** Mr. Speaker, the Bloc Québécois members are yelling, as you can hear, and they are desperate, because they do not like clarity. It scares them.

I was a member of the national assembly in 1995 when the Quebec Liberal Party tried to have the Parti Québécois say clearly that the referendum vote would be about the creation of a new country but the amendment was defeated. These paragons of clarity refused to say that they wanted to have a brand new country. They hid behind the June 12 agreement and had Quebecers vote on that.

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

**Mr. Yvon Charbonneau:** It was not an agreement with Canada, but with the Action démocratique under Mario Dumont. The referendum question was on that agreement. These people are afraid of clarity. Their leader, Parizeau, spent the whole summer saying he wanted to trap Quebecers like lobsters, and use lots of tricks and tactics to confuse people. Parizeau was even ready to make a unilateral declaration of independence after he had refused to use the word country in the referendum question.

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

**Mr. Yvon Charbonneau:** These paragons of clarity keep talking about self determination. We all accept the principle of self determination. But a unilateral decision is not the way. One just does not get out of a country like one gets out of a shopping centre. They do not accept that Quebec self determination is counterbalanced by other things. They do not recognize the heritage we share with all Canadians, our common history, our economic and social links.

*Supply*

All that does not count. They just want to have a vote and get out. It does no work that way; not in a co-operative, not in a marriage, not in a workers' union and not in a professional association. These people are irresponsible. They want to restructure the partnership with Canada. The member for Joliette said "We want to rebuild Canada".

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

**Mr. Yvon Charbonneau:** They have no respect whatsoever for the partnership forged throughout our common history. These people are in a state of total disarray and they want to hide it with shouts and insults. They deny that the rest of Canada has any interest in the issue. For them, the approach is unilateral "Hello, thank you, we are leaving". Even separatist Quebecers have no right to do that.

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

**Mr. Yvon Charbonneau:** Their problem is that their option has lost all or most of its supporters. Parizeau said these people were the spearhead, but the spear has separated from the head.

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

**Mr. Yvon Charbonneau:** They are guided by Parizeau, who is pushing them towards independence and they talk about rebuilding Canada with a new partnership. This option is totally illogical and the people of Quebec see it quite well—

**The Deputy Speaker:** I am sorry to interrupt the member, but the member for Peterborough wishes to raise a point of order.

[*English*]

**Mr. Peter Adams:** Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. It is a reflection on the noise we have been hearing in the House of Commons that it took you four or five minutes to realize that I had a point of order here at this end of the House.

I have to say to you, Mr. Speaker, that I am deeply disturbed by the fact that this afternoon it has been impossible for those of us at this end of the House to follow the speech of my colleague and his predecessors, even though we have an earphone system.

• (1715)

Mr. Speaker, I think you should ensure that my colleague and my other colleagues have an opportunity to be heard in the House of Commons.

**The Deputy Speaker:** The hon. member for Peterborough has raised a valid point of order. I must say that it was fortunate from my point of view that the hon. member was sitting close to the Chair; otherwise I think may have had trouble hearing him if he had been down where the hon. member for Peterborough was sitting. I did indicate by gesture a few times that I thought the noise was excessive and I was having trouble hearing.

I am sorry to hear that the hon. member for Peterborough missed out on the speeches that have taken place this afternoon.

I know that hon. members on all sides of course will want to restrain themselves because we do have freedom of speech in the House and members should listen attentively to what other members are saying even sometimes if we disagree.

[*Translation*]

I will now hear the member for Charlesbourg. I hope his comments are not on the same issue because there is nothing I can do at this point.

**Mr. Richard Marceau:** Mr. Speaker, on the same point of order, I would first tell my colleague that, even if he cannot hear, he is not missing very much, because nothing too astonishing is being said—

**The Deputy Speaker:** I am afraid of such a debate.

[*English*]

It being 5.15 p.m., it is my duty to interrupt the proceedings and put forthwith every question necessary to dispose of the business of supply.

The question is on the amendment. Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the amendment?

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

**Some hon. members:** No.

**The Deputy Speaker:** All those in favour of the amendment will please say yea.

**Some hon. members:** Yea.

**The Deputy Speaker:** All those opposed will please say nay.

**Some hon. members:** Nay.

**The Deputy Speaker:** In my opinion the nays have it.

*And more than five members having risen:*

**The Deputy Speaker:** Call in the members.

*And the bells having rung:*

**The Deputy Speaker:** In accordance with a request from the chief government whip, the division will be deferred until Monday at the conclusion of the time provided for Government Orders.

Is it agreed that we call it 5.30 p.m.?

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

**The Deputy Speaker:** 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

• (1720)

[English]

### VETERANS HEALTH CARE

**Mr. Peter Goldring (Edmonton East, Ref.)** moved:

That, in the opinion of this House, the government should institute national standards for veterans health care with maintenance and special needs provisions, and have these standards agreed upon by all provinces before devolving responsibilities to any province for any portion of care.

He said: Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to speak to Motion No. 13. I will repeat the motion because it is very important:

That, in the opinion of this House, the government should institute national standards for veterans health care with maintenance and special needs provisions, and have these standards agreed upon by all provinces before devolving responsibilities to any province for any portion of care.

The basic concern behind the motion is that the federal government has been too quick to rid itself of its health care responsibilities for veterans by devolving responsibility to the provinces, and that further devolution of responsibility for our veterans' health care should be reviewed with caution.

The government used to fulfill its responsibilities to veterans through a federally funded and administered regime of military hospitals and veterans homes. Over the last several years many of these hospitals and homes have become the responsibility of provincial governments and subject to provincial standards of health care. Yet the provinces are often in the midst of their own cost cutting initiatives.

I have visited many health care facilities for veterans throughout Canada. I have seen firsthand the effects of downloading and consolidation. I have spoken to veterans who have been left to sit in wet and soiled diapers for the better part of a day due to staff shortages and institutional indifference.

Those military veterans who are sick and disabled are subject to two government imposed hardships: standards of health care which are no longer consistent across the country and growing erosion in the quality of veterans health care. A further hardship to which our veterans are exposed is the indifference of the active military to the health care concerns of recently discharged veterans.

On December 16, Colonel Joe Sharpe released the report of his board of inquiry into the health care of our peacekeeping veterans in Croatia. He described the Canadian military's care of sick peacekeepers from Croatia as disgraceful. His chilling comment

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was that the military showed more care and concern for its airplanes than for the sick veterans.

Many of our veterans do not have access to military standards of health care either because the health care responsibilities have already been devolved to particular provinces, or because a disbelieving military, fearful of being seen to favour large numbers of disability claims, denies at the outset that the veteran's health problems relate in any way to his or her term of military service.

Hearing loss from the sound of artillery, cancers as a result of exposure to radioactive toxins in the theatre of war, and psychiatric challenges as a result of exposure to the carnage and inhumanity of war are examples of very different conditions experienced by our veterans from those experienced by the civilian population.

Our political leaders make sure that those whom they send to theatres of war are completely healthy and they do not arrive at a battlefield with disabilities. Our healthy men then return changed by war. Some are damaged physically. Others are damaged psychiatrically. Some return with mysterious but persistent ailments for which there is no identified cause and for which there is no clear cure.

Our veterans should not be subject to civilian levels of health care since their exposures to the theatres of war are far from being the normal civilian experiences of most Canadians.

The Ste. Anne de Bellevue military hospital outside Montreal provides long term care to veterans. The hospital is currently in a limbo status in terms of its proposed devolution to the province of Quebec. The Quebec government, while having the right to act to effect the devolution from the federal government, has not yet done so.

The veterans who are cared for in this institution plus their many supporters prefer that the hospital remain under the jurisdiction of veterans affairs rather than the responsibility being devolved to the province. Veterans are concerned that they will be subject to a lower standard of care if the hospital is administered by the province of Quebec. Veterans are also concerned that they will lose service if their first language is English.

If this hospital were to be devolved to Quebec, there is fear that no Canadian flag would be permitted to fly there if the recent policy resolutions of the Parti Quebecois on flag management were to be implemented, specifically that no Canadian flag be permitted to fly in front of any building under Quebec jurisdiction.

• (1725)

For these reasons alone, quality of health care plus potential effects of separatist politics, I suggest that further devolution to the

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provinces of health care responsibilities for our veterans should be viewed with extreme caution.

A growing number of veterans who return from contemporary theatres of war with unexplained ailments are more likely to be regarded as malingerers by their military superiors.

Louise Richard, a military nurse in the gulf war, comes from a family with a famed military history. Her father was a general in the Royal 22nd Regiment, the Van Doos. She returned from the gulf suffering from multiple ailments including tuberculosis, chronic fatigue, blurred vision and severe pain in her muscles and joints. Her appeals to the military were met with scepticism. Post-traumatic stress indeed.

Captain Terry Riordon had 23 years of military service. He went to the gulf war and returned with multiple disabilities which were categorized by the military as merely epilepsy or psychosis. At the time of his death nine years after his gulf war service, tests showed that his body contained depleted uranium. Captain Riordon was exposed to depleted uranium during his service and now he is dead.

Despite their claims to the contrary, Canadian military leaders clearly knew there was something seriously wrong with Captain Riordon's health. After his death, his body was medically defined in Canada as contagious and then taped shut in an orange toxic bag. Post-traumatic stress again. Captain Riordon's wife had asked the Canadian military to do a tissue analysis but they refused. She turned to U.S. researchers for help.

Other veterans who have become ill after having returned from recent peacekeeping arrangements have indicated that they also want to be tested for the presence of depleted uranium in their systems, but the military says that such tests prove nothing since depleted uranium is not harmful. What the military fails to acknowledge is that depleted uranium outside one's body has very different effects than uranium particles that are ingested in a theatre of war. In such circumstances I have been advised that the inner body acts like an open sore permitting the radioactive effects of depleted uranium to directly affect cells.

In my capacity as opposition critic for veterans affairs, I have proposed that an annual medical assessment be made available to any member or veteran of our armed forces who requests it so that no one would be compelled to wait for the results of tissue sample tests in the United States.

Any member of the military who has reason to believe that he or she is exposed to toxins in a theatre of conflict would have a legal right to a determination of the nature and extent of such exposure. Such procedures would also facilitate annual documentation of developments of physical ailments and ongoing effects of environmental exposures which would assist in future health and disability assessments.

It defies logic that so many returning soldiers could all be categorized as suffering from stress related illnesses. This is the case with many of the disability claims resulting from service in Croatia, including that of Colonel Matt Stopford. To say that these claimants are suffering from some form of post-traumatic stress does grave disservice to the bravery of these men and women. Any categorization of the illnesses of these soldiers as resulting from a nervous condition castigates all soldiers as potential malingerers even though many are career oriented soldiers with distinguished military careers.

When soldiers bound for Rwanda raised questions concerning the effects of anthrax vaccine and its relationship to gulf war syndrome, they were compelled to take the vaccine under threat of court martial. Such is the case of former Sergeant Michael Kipling whose court martial has commenced in Winnipeg this week despite his resignation from the military. The military relentlessly and shamelessly hounds Kipling through the courts to this day.

Some illnesses defy medical categorization based on the current state of medical knowledge. The gulf war syndrome is suspected to be caused by the anthrax vaccine or more likely by exposure to depleted uranium. It may be caused by both.

• (1730)

Whatever the cause, our soldiers are returning from these theatres of war with very serious illnesses and reportedly high levels of radioactivity in their bodies. Their claims for assistance must be given the benefit of the doubt and not have doubts cast upon them through the insult of categorizing most such problems as stress related.

The motion before the House is one step toward more formal recognition that throughout their career and afterward the men and women of our military bravely face experiences that most of us do not. Their bravery, when face to face with the dark side of humanity, calls for them to be treated differently upon their return to Canada or their retirement from the military. We must acknowledge that their lives are different from the lives of most of us in terms of what they have had to face.

National standards of veterans health care referenced specifically to the unique experiences of our military are but one step. We must recognize that the devolution of the health care of our veterans to the provinces should be approached with extreme caution and safeguards, if it is to be continued at all. We owe a great debt to our veterans. Surely we must provide them with the best of health care at all times. We must never forget.

I would seek unanimous consent to make this motion votable.

**The Deputy Speaker:** Is there unanimous consent that the motion be votable?

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**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

**An hon. member:** No.

**Mr. Bob Wood (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Veterans Affairs, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise in my place today to respond to the motion of the hon. member for Edmonton East regarding national standards for veterans health care.

The motion calls for maintenance and special needs provisions that would be based upon national standards. These standards would be agreed upon by all provinces before health care responsibilities for veterans were to be devolved to any province for any portion of care.

The government's experience to date is that there has been no problem in the quality of care that could not be solved through its relationship and its agreements with the contract facilities and the provinces. If situations arise where action is required we should let the existing system work, rather than begin the long process of working with the provinces to create a national system.

I am not saying that the system cannot be improved. There is room to do that. Veterans Affairs Canada has 75 contract facilities across the country. The department encourages all of its contract facilities to be accredited. Veterans Affairs Canada also recognizes and respects provincial standards of care and, to provide assurance that the level of care is meeting the health needs of veterans, works with the provinces on quality assurance issues. The department also monitors its own set of 10 outcome areas in its contract and community facilities.

This is the way to improve the system, through the agencies and authorities now in place and through the effective partnership that has evolved with the provinces in the delivery of health care to veterans. That is why we should continue to allow the work that is already under way to be refined and improved upon in the best interests of Canada's veterans.

The problem with the motion is that it involves complex issues and proposes a very simplistic solution. No one who has watched the evolution of health care across the country would say that there are simple solutions, especially when these matters involve both federal and provincial jurisdictions and both the private and public sectors.

In resolving these complex issues there are several constants of which Canadians can be assured. One constant is the good work and continued interest of veterans organizations. They have monitored the provision of health care for veterans very closely over the years. I can assure the House that if the health care delivery system somehow fails to meet the needs of our veterans, these organizations let us know it. They are very forthright in their views and they enable the health care system in this country to respond.

Another constant is the emphasis that Canadians, as a whole, place on ensuring that our veterans receive treatment commensurate with the gratitude we feel as a nation; our gratitude for the sacrifices of those who served their country so well in our fights for freedom and democracy.

• (1735 )

A third constant is the importance that the Parliament of Canada places on making sure that veterans receive appropriate health care. Today's debate on the motion of the hon. member is one example. Another is the report done by the subcommittee of the other place, entitled "Raising the Bar: Creating a New Standard in Veterans Health Care". This report provided input for a new residential care strategy by the Government of Canada.

Finally, a fourth constant in dealing with the complex issue of health care for veterans is the work of Veterans Affairs Canada. I will talk about the services the department provides in a moment.

First, I would like to emphasize that when it comes to actual delivery of the health care services there are many different forces at work. For example, within the health care system there is a shift toward primary health care that emphasizes early identification of problems or potential problems and taking a holistic approach to human health.

The results are a growing emphasis on home care. Veterans Affairs Canada has been at the forefront of this movement with its veterans independence program, VIP. This program was first put in place in the early 1980s and has evolved to meet the changing needs of veterans. Through VIP, clients are offered choices for services based on their needs. The idea is to permit them to remain at home or in their communities as long as possible. This program has been called one of the most comprehensive and advanced home care programs in the world and it may well set the standard for the delivery of health care services in the 21st century.

Another important shift in health care delivery in Canada is the aging of our veterans. This is one of the areas where Veterans Affairs Canada is making a significant contribution, not only to the health of veterans, but to our understanding of the ways to respond to the aging population. The department has been recognized internationally for its work in research and care giving. The department has been involved in a number of research projects and helps the government to make informed decisions on ways to ensure that the health system meets the changing needs of all Canadians.

Another change in the provision of health care in Canada is the shift throughout the country from a clinical model of delivering health to a residential model. Clinical care utilizes nurses as the primary provider of patient care. In a residential model the nurses and other health care professionals serve as team leaders and most of the direct care to the patients is provided by health care aides who are part of these teams. Veterans Affairs Canada, through its

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review of veterans care needs project team, has determined that this emphasis on residential care is in keeping with the principal needs of veterans. Clinical care is still available for veterans and it is maintained in the larger residential care facilities.

The motion of the hon. member for Edmonton East proposes national standards for residential care facilities agreed upon by the provinces. But given this complex and changing environment, I do not believe that agreeing on a set of standards is realistic. The environment is changing too quickly. We know that reaching agreements with the provinces takes time. By the time an agreement is reached the environment can change so much that the terms of the agreement are no longer applicable.

Moreover, the needs of Canada's veterans are becoming more urgent as these veterans get older. We need to act quickly to address veterans' needs, not wait to reach an agreement with the provinces. I believe that the federal government has taken a more effective course in using the processes now at our disposal to promote a high standard of health care in these facilities.

One of the most important aspects of the process now in place is the vigilance of veterans organizations. Where they have perceived that health care delivery has fallen below a standard they feel should apply to veterans, they have spoken out and the federal government has responded. For that reason, we have a process in place today which helps to ensure that veterans receive good care in these facilities. The process involves an annual review of long term care facilities. Staff of Veterans Affairs Canada, usually the area councillors and district office nurses, visit contract and community facilities. They speak to the veterans on a confidential basis. They ask questions designed to determine whether the needs of our veterans are being met.

The questions they ask involve 10 specific areas of health care that research has shown to be the most important for our veterans. Those 10 areas are: safety and security, food quality, access to clinical services, access to specialized services, medication regime, access to spiritual guidance, socialization and recreation, activation and ambulation, personal care, and sanitation.

• (1740)

This is an extensive list. It is a comprehensive list of the key issues that would likely be negotiated with the provinces if we were to try to establish a national standard for veterans health care. It is a list of key health care deliverables that are already being applied across the country, not as a result of an agreement with the provinces, but through the persuasion of Veterans Affairs Canada.

The hon. member has good intentions with this motion. He wants to ensure that veterans can receive quality health care at long term residence facilities, but it would mean a more complex round of negotiations with the provinces. It would become more difficult,

not easier, to make any changes necessary to improve the health care provided to veterans. Such negotiations would delay the real changes that can be made now to improve residential care for veterans. There are already initiatives in place that will deliver the results we all desire, that is, quality health care for our veterans.

[*Translation*]

**Mr. Réal Ménard (Hochelaga—Maisonneuve, BQ):** Mr. Speaker, I wish to congratulate the member on his motion. I know that it stems from a sensitivity to our elders, who certainly acted on the strength of their convictions in World War I and even World War II, although certain historians claim that, strictly speaking, it was all one war.

So that there is no misunderstanding, I would like to go over the motion once again. The Reform Party member is moving:

That, in the opinion of this House, the government should institute national standards for veterans' health care with maintenance and special needs provisions, and have these standards agreed upon by all provinces before devolving responsibilities to any province for any portion of care.

I think that in our respective ridings we all have veterans who come to us about the deteriorating health care system and the various administrative difficulties they are experiencing. But it seems to me that there is a problem with the motion being suggested.

First of all, the assumption is made that management of veterans services is an exclusively federal jurisdiction. Even though funding for access to health care comes from the federal government, the fact remains that the services people receive are often provided by the various provincial health care systems.

It is difficult for us to support national standards. True, we already have the Canada Health Act, which is somewhat of a paradox. When one looks at the constitutional distribution of powers, one realizes that, except for the military aspect and for quarantine, the federal government has little responsibility with regard to health.

Mr. Speaker, allow me to salute my colleague, the chairman of the Standing Committee on Health, who always seems interested when I make a speech. I am not so pretentious as to think he is a member of my fan club, but I do think he is a friend.

I was talking about the paradox of having a national health act when the Constitution gives the federal government very little responsibility with regard to health since it is only responsible for the health of veterans and for any issues related to quarantine and to mechanisms to prevent contagion.

Even though the federal government does not have primary responsibility with regard to health, it has a Department of Health employing several thousand public servants.

• (1745)

The Canada Health Act promotes the five following principles: universality, portability, comprehensiveness and public administration, and of course universality. These principles are the main features of our national legislation on the health care system. Of course, we believe that these principles have merit, but that it is primarily the provinces that must ensure the comprehensiveness, the universality, the public character, and the portability of the health care system.

In other words, no matter in what region, in Quebec or in the rest of Canada, people must be sure to have access to health care.

We would readily have agreed. The Reform member who, I know, is greatly concerned by these issues should know this: we would certainly have supported a motion asking the federal government to restore transfer payments for health. But when this government becomes history, we will never forget that, through its policies, its unilateral cuts, from 1993 to 2001, this government cut several billion dollars in health care alone. This must be said to all those who are listening today. On the whole, transfer payments were reduced by \$42 billion, and nearly a third of that was cut from health care, and for Quebec alone, it was \$4 billion.

Lucien Bouchard, the Premier of Quebec, one of its great premiers, is certainly one of the most gifted men of his generation. I believe that, if I called for unanimous consent, I would get it, acknowledging Lucien Bouchard as certainly one of the most gifted men of his generation.

At the first ministers conference, the Premier of Quebec reminded the others that, Quebec alone had had \$4 billion cut from health. I believe that we need to make the connection with the position the premiers adopted and the motion our Reform Party colleague is proposing. If we are to provide better care to our fellow citizens who served on the battlefield because of their convictions, adopting national standards is not the way to do it. I repeat, however, that this objective is an eminently desirable one. The way to do it is to reinvest in the health care systems existing in the provinces.

I am dying to see what is in the budget. I shall be here on Monday, February 28, of this year of our Lord 2000 AD, in order to find out what the Minister of Health and the Minister of Finance have to say. This will be a historical responsibility; all members are going to follow the budget speech.

We know very well that it will not be possible, whether in the specific case of care for veterans or the case of all those covered by the health system who end up in the emergency departments, in the CLSCs, in the institutions. The people in those places know that the Minister of Health and the Minister of Finance need to speak the truth and redress the wrongs of the past.

Let me say that the Quebec government, which is one of the best ever, wants to offer health services to our fellow citizens, but is

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being deprived of several billions of dollars because the federal government, suddenly and without negotiating with the provinces, acted unilaterally. Do you know what "unilaterally" means? It means a one-sided decision. The federal government without negotiating with the provinces deprived them in a cavalier fashion of several billions of dollars. As I said, we appreciate the motion.

• (1750)

I think that the hon. member, who is the chair of the Standing Committee on Health and who is said to be a strong supporter of the Minister of Health for future events, will join me in asking his government to exert pressure and to make money available in the Minister of Finance's budget, so that the provinces can meet the needs of all their clientele, including the veterans.

Again, I thank the hon. member for being sensitive to this issue, but we do not believe that the solution lies in national standards.

I cannot, as a Bloc Québécois member who is highly respected by his peers on all sides of the House, support the idea of national standards. This would not be in agreement with our vision. I would go against my own principles.

I will conclude by asking all members of this House to ensure that transfer payments are restored, to make sure that the provinces, which are responsible for the health care system, can meet the needs of all their clientele, including the veterans, with new moneys. This is our position on that motion.

[English]

**Mr. Gordon Earle (Halifax West, NDP):** Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to have the opportunity to rise tonight to speak to this motion, which I think is a very important motion. I want to commend my hon. colleague from Edmonton East for bringing forward his concern for the well-being and the health of our veterans.

We in the NDP support the motion. We think it is very important that there be national standards for veterans' health care.

National Defence, as we know, comes under federal jurisdiction and we feel that the federal government must not abandon its responsibility to ensure that those who defend our country receive quality health care.

Unfortunately, this is not happening at present. We all know the many stories, and we see them coming forth daily, of our military personnel who are returning home from missions abroad: the gulf war, Somalia, various other missions. These people are ending up suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder, depleted uranium and so forth.

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What we see is a state of denial by DND with respect to even giving these veterans the benefit of the doubt that their illnesses may have in fact been caused by something that happened while they were overseas.

I will speak for a moment on depleted uranium. I attended a briefing today where DND again attempted to indicate that there was no real serious concern about this material, no danger in this and that there was no evidence to support this. However, this seems to fly in the face of the very real evidence that we see from the people who are suffering and have been exposed to this material.

I will remind the House of what Dr. Rosalie Bertell, a famous epidemiologist, had to say about depleted uranium. She said:

DU is highly toxic to humans, both chemically as a heavy metal and radiologically as an alpha particle emitter which is very dangerous when taken internally.

Upon impact, the DU bursts into flames. It produces a toxic and radioactive ceramic aerosol that is much lighter than uranium dust. It can travel in the air tens of kilometres from the point of release, or settle as dust suspended in the air waiting to be stirred up by human or animal movement.

It is very small and can be breathed by anyone from babies and pregnant women to the elderly and the sick. This radioactive and toxic ceramic can stay in the lungs for years, irradiating the surrounding tissue with powerful alpha particles. It can affect the lungs, gastrointestinal system, liver, kidneys, bones, other tissues and renal systems.

She goes on to say:

It is most likely a major contributor to the Gulf War Syndrome experienced by the veterans and the people of Iraq.

We know that after the war Iraq experienced explosive rates of stillbirths, children born with defects, childhood leukemia and other cancers and, in particular, near the Basara region where these shells were fired.

I think we have to look seriously at the situation concerning depleted uranium and not put our heads in the sand and try to pretend that it does not exist.

However, we do see that there is a constant state of denial by the department to connect any of the symptoms experienced to depleted uranium or to the missions that our soldiers have been on.

• (1755 )

Now, after a lot of pressure, a lot of studies and so forth, the government has finally agreed to do some testing of the veterans for depleted uranium. Even then, I have some concern that the testing may not be as thorough, as impartial and as complete as one would like because the talk today was only about the testing of urine. However, if we want to have any faith restored in our military and in the capability of the government to support our men

and women when they return home, we must take an impartial look at this whole situation.

Another example of why we need some high standards of health care for our veterans is the case of the former Sergeant Kipling, a veteran with 26 years experience. Eight years ago he refused to take a vaccine when it was administered before the gulf war conflict. What did he get for this refusal? He got a court martial. He refused the vaccine because he was concerned about his health and about the effects of the vaccine, which has not been approved in Canada for general use. He had many questions surrounding its safety and his well-being, yet rather than getting support, he was court-martialled.

Let us look at those individuals who do not come under military health care. Those of us who come under the provincial health care system do not find ourselves faced with these problems. We do not have to accept medicines or vaccinations that we do not want to take. However, this is the case in the military.

If the federal government does institute national standards for health care with maintenance and special needs provisions, as indicated in the motion, it may indeed have a problem having such standards agreed upon by all the provinces, particularly if the federal government does not restore the funding that has been cut from the health care system. If there is going to be a standard of health care there has to be sufficient funding to meet that standard.

We all know that there have been billions and billions of dollars cut from the health care system to the point that even our provincial health care systems are struggling today. People are waiting in long lineups in hospitals. People are not able to get the kind of care that they should get because of the funding crisis in the health care system.

Even if we did agree to national standards for our veterans, there is still a problem in that regard if there is not sufficient funding coming forward.

The motion talks about having these standards agreed upon by all provinces before devolving responsibility to any province for any portion of care. I would point out that the federal government is extremely good at devolving responsibilities to other levels of government or to other parties without first putting the things in order that should be put in order.

Let us look at the example of the Halifax International Airport. That airport was eventually passed down to the Halifax Airport Authority without the federal government first accepting responsibility and cleaning up the environmental hazard due to the pyritic slate in the area. This was a very important issue that should have been resolved before the transfer took place. However, the federal government put the authority in a position that it had to take it or

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leave it in the final bargaining. The authority had to finally accept what should have been the responsibility of the federal government, which was to clean up the hazard before devolving the airport down to the authority.

Again, I would have that kind of concern with national health standards for our veterans. We should work these things out in such a way that we do not leave the provinces with any responsibilities that should rightly be carried by the federal government.

We can see from the massive cuts that have taken place in our health care system that we are now slowly moving toward a two-tier American style health system. It is time for Canadians to take back control of our country, to take back control of the things we should control.

I recall back to 1993 when the federal government decided to get out of the housing program and pass the responsibility over to the provinces. We now see the results of that where we have many people without homes who are dying on the street. Why? It is because the federal government withdrew from the social housing program. It devolved and put this responsibility down to the provinces and again did not provide adequate funding to maintain adequate shelter for our citizens.

• (1800)

We must be very careful when we talk about the devolving of responsibility and passing it down. The federal government seems to be good at wanting to privatize things, to put them into the hands of the private sector as if they can do so much better than public control.

This is a very important motion that has been brought forward concerning the health of our veterans. It is very important that Canada supports and looks after those who have gone off to defend our borders, to fight in places where perhaps we would not even want to go ourselves, and to carry out jobs that many of us would not want to do. The least we can do is make sure that when they return they are well looked after and that we give them the benefit of the doubt when they are suffering.

I will wind up very quickly by saying again that I commend the member for bringing forth his concern in this motion. I certainly feel that all of us in the House should be concerned about the well-being of our veterans and do everything we can to ensure that their health and safety are carried forward in a very positive way. We should also remember the effect not just on those veterans but on their families, their wives, their children, and the communities in which they live.

**The Deputy Speaker:** I understand the hon. member for New Brunswick Southwest is speaking clothed as he is with special dispensation.

**Mr. Greg Thompson (New Brunswick Southwest, PC):** Mr. Speaker, I appreciate that. You might notice that I am being

surrounded by some of the most cerebral people in the House. It is nice to be accompanied by so many members from all sides of the House. It very seldom happens in this place.

There are a couple of things I want to make clear from the outset. Our critic in this area, who should have spoken tonight, the member for Saint John, had to go back to her constituency. I am pleased to be speaking in her place.

If we look back at people who have taken on causes in the House from time to time, I do not think any member of the House has been more dedicated to a particular cause than the member for Saint John. She has done an extremely good job in working with the government, sometimes criticizing the government but certainly working with the minister on this file.

If the veterans are looking at one particular minister in the past that really did it all for them it would be George Hees. We are hoping that the new minister from Newfoundland will evolve into that type of minister in terms of historical recognition of someone that really did something for veterans. Obviously there is more to do.

I want to read the motion to Canadians so they will have an idea of what we are talking about. The member for Edmonton East, and we applaud him for it, moved this motion:

That, in the opinion of this House, the government should institute national standards for veterans health care with maintenance and special needs provisions, and have these standards agreed upon by all provinces before dissolving responsibilities to any province for any portion of care.

The Bloc member was somewhat agitated and a bit emotional on the topic. Maybe the members from Quebec would agree with me in what I am about to say. It is probably the only point we will agree on tonight. The veterans hospital in Montreal is a hospital I am familiar with because that little stretch on Ste. Anne de Bellevue is the shortest piece of road between routes 20 and 40. When I do from time to time drive back to New Brunswick I take that little street by the hospital we are speaking about, the one that led to this discussion. It is the last veterans hospital in Canada that will be taken away and devolved into provincial jurisdiction. In other words, the federal government will move that hospital over to the province of Quebec to look after the veterans. It is telling us that is just a proposal. No negotiations are presently under way but that is obviously what it is looking at. I believe it is the last hospital in Canada so designated.

• (1805)

This is part of the bigger picture which I think every member of the House has expressed in terms of the federal government's lack of funding in health care. We are seeing that from one end of Canada to the other in the have provinces and have not provinces.

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We are finding that every province has to scramble to find a way to fund health care because of the denial and cutbacks in funding from Ottawa.

When we are talking about the five principles of health care in the country, those principles have been violated time and time again. We do not have a so-called universal system of health care. Health care delivery, primary care delivery, varies from province to province. Some provinces can afford to do more. Some provinces cannot afford to do more. Some provinces have continually done less year after year after year.

Why is this? It is because of the cutbacks by the federal government. We might argue about what the numbers are, but most of us, regardless of what side of the House we sit on, are arguing in the \$10 billion to \$12 billion range. That is a lot of change, but it is money that the provinces cannot come up with.

When the model for universal health care or medicare in Canada was invented back a number of years ago and we entered into agreements with the provinces, the federal government was coming in for a bigger share of the cost of delivering those services.

We have to recognize that constitutionally the delivery of primary care is a provincial jurisdiction. Maybe what we are talking about, to have this matter finally solved, is some kind of constitutional arrangement that would allow people who actually make the rules to somehow have access to the tax dollars to do that. Presently the federal government has the money to do it but it is trying to enforce the rules on the provinces without giving them the tax dollars to actually do it. We have to sit down and intelligently talk about it at some point.

Just before coming to the House I was in a meeting. Believe it or not the topic of discussion was the delivery of health care services to seniors, our aging population. As hon. members know, that is the next crisis that will hit health care and Canadian society as our aging population continues to grow.

It is heartwarming that one of the individuals to whom I spoke just a few short minutes was a gentleman named Larry F. Gray. He is the service officer for the Royal Canadian Legion. He is a retired gentleman and donates a good deal of his time to helping veterans, older citizens, cope with the realities of the present day. I should have him standing beside me because he could contribute to this debate like none of us could.

One of the statistics he gave me indicated that there are approximately 1,630 legion branches in Canada with 450,000 legion members. If we were creative and we wanted to do something, imagine what we could do if we could mobilize on a community basis those people back home. I think we have to find some way of reinventing the wheel. I know tax dollars will do part of it but they cannot do all of it.

I know the federal minister raised this trial balloon a few short weeks ago. It was systematically shot down by just about every province in terms of delivering community care back in the communities, back in the provinces. We were talking about home care and community care. It was routinely shot down by the premiers. It goes back to my earlier argument. They are saying "Listen, we cannot afford to deliver the programs that we have out there presently. Let us not come up with something else".

• (1810)

We have to sit down as a nation at the table and realize our limitations. What can we do to solve the problem? Let us not continue to argue about it. Let us not continue to talk about the past. We have to look at the future for ways of realistically dealing with the health care crisis in Canada.

The member's motion before us is laudable. It should be supported by every member in the House. At the end of the argument he is not just talking about veterans, although that is the primary concern here this evening. It is about all Canadians. He is really saying in this motion that we should support health care to a level where all Canadians can expect the best health care in the world. We are capable of doing that as a nation.

We are getting into education. We are getting into a provincial jurisdiction again. Let us realize as parliamentarians that the two biggest issues are education and health care. They go hand in hand. Let us educate our young people so they have meaningful jobs and the kinds of income that will sustain our tax system and support the programs we are talking about in the House such as the best health care system in the world. We can do it. I applaud the member. We are in a position to support his motion.

**The Deputy Speaker:** If the hon. member for Edmonton East speaks at this point, he will close the debate.

**Mr. Peter Goldring (Edmonton East, Ref.):** Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleagues for their comments on this very important issue. I believe it is possible to develop national standards. I thank the hon. parliamentary secretary for his comments. He made reference to a comprehensive list that is used now to discuss and to look at each individual veterans health care centre. It would not be complicated to expand that list, to formalize that list so we have national standards.

The reason for national standards for veterans health care is that veterans are not and have not experienced the life experiences of ordinary citizens. This manifests itself on my visits to the veterans health care centres in many ways. For example, the oxygen rooms in veterans health care centres are much larger than in ordinary senior homes. There is also psychiatric difficulties that veterans experience which can manifest themselves in their later days

considerably more than with ordinary seniors because some of them had horrific experiences in their wartime service.

I will relate a quick story of my experience in the military as a military policeman being sent to downtown Trenton to pick up a person from a hotel. As I was driving him to his home I thought he was receiving fantastic service for an impaired corporal. I found out why I was picking him up and taking him home.

Halfway home he broke down and started mimicking machine gun sounds. He broke into tears. I left him at his doorstep with his wife consoling him. On my return to the guardhouse I asked the sergeant what had happened. He explained. This gentleman was a tailgunner in World War II. He had taken off, tired and fell fast asleep. The bumping of the takeoff awoke him. He saw a plane in his gunsight and shot it out of the sky. It was one of his own planes. These type of experiences only war veterans have had.

Yes, veterans in veterans care facilities need extra consideration. Yes, they need extra rules. Yes, they need extra protection. This is very clear, whether it is the Perley Rideau Hospital where there are ongoing discussions right now or Ste Anne de Bellevue. Before we devolve more we should develop standards that would reflect the extra psychiatric help. My experience and the experience of others who have been in the military is that we were brought up on cigarettes. A lifetime of that does affect them. There is a substantially higher level of lung problems among veterans.

• (1815)

Yes, there is need for extra provisions for veterans health care centres. How could an ordinary hospital understand all of the problems of veterans? It is very important for these issues to be addressed in special facilities with special rules for the veterans who need it.

I asked earlier for unanimous consent to make this motion votable. This was denied. Therefore, I now seek unanimous consent that the motion be withdrawn and that the subject matter be referred to the Standing Committee on National Defence and Veterans Affairs.

**The Deputy Speaker:** Is there unanimous consent that the motion be withdrawn and that the subject matter thereof be referred to the Standing Committee on National Defence and Veterans Affairs?

**Some hon. members:** Agreed.

**An hon. member:** No.

**The Deputy Speaker:** There is no consent. The time provided for the consideration of Private Members' Business has now expired. As the motion has not been designated as a votable item, the order is dropped from the order paper.

### *Adjournment Debate*

## ADJOURNMENT PROCEEDINGS

[English]

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

### FISHERIES

**Hon. Charles Caccia (Davenport, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, on December 10, 1999 I asked the Minister of Foreign Affairs when Canada planned to ratify the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea. Tonight I would like to reiterate some of the reasons why it is in Canada's interest to ratify this law.

Canada signed the United Nations Convention on the Law of Sea in 1982. This marked the culmination of more than 14 years of work involving participation by more than 150 countries. The convention needed ratification by 60 countries. It entered into force in 1994 without Canada's ratification.

Today the law of the sea is the virtual constitution of the world's oceans. It regulates a wide range of issues including pollution prevention, conservation of fish stocks, limits of coastal state jurisdictions, states' rights and responsibilities and mining of the ocean floor. The law of the sea is a landmark achievement of international law treating the resources of the ocean floor as the common heritage of mankind.

Now that 143 countries have ratified the law of the sea, now that 18 years have passed since Canada signed it, and now that the red book promise is seven years old, this globally recognized regime is still without Canada.

The 1993 Liberal Party red book says: "New multilateral regimes are needed to address many emerging global issues, the management of global fish stocks, the protection of the world's atmosphere" and so on. It goes on to say: "A Liberal government will foster the development of such multilateral forums and agreements, including an improved law of the sea".

On December 10, 1999 the Minister of Foreign Affairs said that the only question remaining was the complete ratification of the straddling stocks agreement. The excuse Canada gave for not ratifying the convention in 1994 was problems with the deep seabed mining provisions of the convention. Canada is thus putting obstacles in the way of ratification of the law of the sea.

This time Canada is awaiting complete ratification of the agreement for the conservation and management of straddling fish stocks and highly migratory fish stocks. This agreement promotes good order in the oceans through the effective management and conservation of high seas resources by establishing detailed minimum international standards for the conservation and manage-

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ment of straddling fish stocks and highly migratory fish stocks; by setting out principles for the conservation and management of those fish stocks based on the precautionary approach and the best available scientific information; by ensuring that such measures taken under national jurisdiction and in the high seas are compatible and coherent; and finally, ensuring there are effective mechanisms for compliance and enforcement of those measures on the high seas.

• (1820)

Canada's objective of conserving national fish stocks cannot be achieved by the straddling fish stock agreement alone. Canada must achieve its objectives through international co-operation. Canada, with three oceans and immense marine resources, has a special responsibility to show international leadership. Therefore Canada can only gain by ratifying the law of the sea convention rather than risk losing its international reputation by further delaying the ratification of this important law.

[Translation]

**Mr. Denis Paradis (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I thank the member for Davenport for his comments.

Canada promised to ratify the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea and it will keep that promise. But it is important that it do so at the right time.

What constitutes the right time will depend on Canadian high seas fisheries policy.

[English]

Since 1995 Canada has focused its efforts on the development and adoption of the UN agreement on straddling and highly migratory fish stocks. This agreement fills the gaps left in the law of the sea convention relating to high seas fisheries management. Canada played a leading role in the negotiation of the UN fish agreement which provides for a strong conservation, management and enforcement regime on the high seas. We need an effective international high seas enforcement regime to protect fish stocks which straddle Canada's 200 mile fishing zone and the adjacent high seas.

[Translation]

We intend to ratify the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea as soon as an effective high seas regime is in place. This will include the introduction of the UN fisheries agreement and its effective enforcement between Canada and the main nations fishing off our coasts.

Canada ratified the United Nations fisheries agreement on August 3, 1999, and encourages other nations, including members of the European Union, to do the same.

[English]

## TAXATION

**Mr. Grant McNally (Dewdney—Alouette, Ref.):** Mr. Speaker, on November 5 I asked the Minister of Finance a question about taxes for business and why he did not undertake to reduce taxes for businesses to help the economy. At that time the parliamentary secretary responded that we already have very low taxes for businesses. I simply disagree with that statement.

As the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Natural Resources will be answering my question, I assume the Liberal government views taxes as a natural resource to be gathered into their coffers to redistribute as they see fit. We are witnessing that with what is happening at human resources. We know all about that billion dollar boondoggle. Perhaps it is because of the underlying belief that tax dollars are a natural resource. I can only assume that.

I did see the parliamentary secretary practising his answer. I hope he puts away the scripted response that has been given to him by the department and actually answers the question. It would be reassuring.

**Mr. Lynn Myers:** Mr. Speaker, why does the hon. member not put his script away? What is he reading?

**Mr. Grant McNally:** Mr. Speaker, I hear the member for Waterloo—Wellington also saying that he wishes the parliamentary secretary would put away his scripted question and answer as well. I thank him for that.

The Minister of Industry has just wakened to the fact that corporate taxes are very high in this country and they need to be reduced.

**Mr. Lynn Myers:** Rubbish.

**Mr. Grant McNally:** Mr. Speaker, the member for Waterloo—Wellington says rubbish, but the Minister of Industry says this, and I will quote it directly for him and send him the article:

Essentially the brain drain is a job drain.

What studies are turning up is not that personal taxes are such a big deal, but that opportunity is leading people to the United States. If it is opportunity, then we have to look at the policies that are going to increase opportunity in Canada.

He goes on to state that corporate taxes are high on his list of wishes. That was the Minister of Industry. I hope he has a chance to sit down and talk to the Minister of Finance in the next couple of days because the Prime Minister already leaked that the budget would be announced on February 28. We hope there are going to be substantial reductions in taxation, not only for small businesses,

but for hard working Canadians as well. We really hope that will be the case. We somehow doubt it, but we hope that will be the case.

• (1825)

I am going to anticipate part of what the answer of my colleague will be: that we have low taxes, the minister has reduced taxes, everything is going fine, just wait until February 28 and we will see what kind of great things the government is going to do. I would state that this is the government that has increased taxes year after year in a shell game approach of saying that it has reduced taxes when, in effect, it has increased them.

The government does not see that reducing personal income taxes and taxes for business will stimulate the economy. The Reform Party has a proposal which has been endorsed by WEFA, a highly regarded independent organization which the Minister of Finance uses himself for his own numbers that he runs for his budget projections, which says that this is a very good program in which we will be able to substantially reduce taxation to stimulate the economy.

It is my wish and my hope that the government will take such an approach to stimulate the economy and to substantially reduce taxes for businesses and for all Canadians. However, I do not think it is actually going to be delivered by the Liberals because of their actions of increasing taxes over and over again. We will wait to see.

I urge Canadians to wait to see what kind of new spending the government is going to announce when the budget is brought forward. I wait with bated breath to hear my colleague's, hopefully unscripted, response.

**Mr. Brent St. Denis (Parliamentary Secretary to Minister of Natural Resources, Lib.):** Mr. Speaker, I would like to say first that the sense of humour of the member for Dewdney—Alouette is almost as good as his hockey skills.

The government has always taken the issue of business taxes very seriously. In fact it was this government which set up a technical committee on business taxation, announced in the 1996

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budget, because we were and are concerned about the impact of business taxes on jobs and growth.

However, we must not lose perspective concerning the problems we inherited when first elected in 1993. In fact we were left with quite a mess.

First, we had to deal with a \$42 billion deficit. Nothing could take priority over wrestling that deficit to the ground. In fact, we have announced a string of surpluses which, to my understanding, is a record in the history of this country, and we are proud of that.

Second, Canada still faces a debt burden that is the second largest in the OECD. Five years ago 36 cents out of every dollar collected was used to pay interest on the debt. We have successfully brought it down to 27 cents on each dollar, and it is falling. This is clearly an important problem that needs further fixing.

Third, we have a personal income tax burden which is the highest we have had in our history, granted, and too high in relation to other developed nations. That is why this is our number one tax priority.

However, this is not to say that we will not act on business taxes. We will. The 1999 fall economic and fiscal update stated that this government is committed to ensuring that we have an internationally competitive business tax system.

I am confident that the upcoming budget will lay out a multi-year tax reduction plan which will respond responsibly to our commitment to split surpluses between tax and debt reduction on the one hand and social and economic investment on the other hand.

I remind the member across the way to be here on February 28 to hear the good news.

**The Deputy Speaker:** The motion to adjourn the House is now deemed to have been adopted. The House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 10 a.m., pursuant to Standing Order 24(1).

(The House adjourned at 6.28 p.m.)







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