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OFFICIAL REPORT
(HANSARD)

Tuesday, February 5, 2002

—

Speaker: The Honourable Peter Milliken

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HOUSE OF COMMONS

Tuesday, February 5, 2002

The House met at 10 a.m.

Prayers

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

●(1005)

[*Translation*]

GOVERNMENT RESPONSE TO PETITIONS

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

* * *

[*English*]

BUDGET IMPLEMENTATION ACT, 2001

Hon. John McCallum (for the Minister of Finance) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-49, an act to implement certain provisions of the budget tabled in parliament on December 10, 2001.

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

* * *

[*Translation*]

CANADIAN INTERNATIONAL TRADE TRIBUNAL ACT

Hon. Pierre Pettigrew (Minister for International Trade, Lib.) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-50, an act to amend certain acts as a result of the accession of the People's Republic of China to the agreement establishing the World Trade Organization.

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

* * *

[*English*]

CRIMINAL CODE

Mr. John Cannis (Scarborough Centre, Lib.) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-429, an act to amend the Criminal Code (destruction of national flag).

He said: Mr. Speaker, what I am asking, through this initiative to amend the criminal code after section 56, is that everyone who, without lawful cause, wilfully damages or destroys in any manner, burns, defaces, defiles, mutilates, tramples upon or otherwise

desecrates the national flag would be guilty of an offence and liable on summary convictions.

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

* * *

PETITIONS

VIA RAIL

Mr. Peter Adams (Peterborough, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise to present a petition, not only from citizens of the Peterborough area but from citizens of Toronto, Brampton and Bobcaygeon, a wide region around Peterborough.

The petitioners point out that Canada supports the Kyoto protocol. They point out that one way to reduce greenhouse gas emissions is to develop sustainable public transportation. They point out that a rail service between Peterborough and Toronto would help businesses and tourism in Peterborough and, at the same time, would help the environment.

The petition has support in more than 10 federal ridings.

The petitioners call upon parliament to authorize the renewal of VIA Rail service between Peterborough and Toronto, Ontario.

KIDNEY DISEASE

Mr. Peter Adams (Peterborough, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to present another petition from the citizens of the Peterborough area concerning the Institute of Nutrition, Metabolism and Diabetes, which is one of the institutes of the Canadian Institutes of Health Research.

The petitioners know that this institute does fine work. It supports research in relation to diet, digestion, excretion, metabolism and things of that type. However these citizens are interested in kidney research and believe the work of this institute would be enhanced if the word kidney were included in its public title.

The petitioners call upon parliament to encourage the Canadian Institutes of Health Research to explicitly include kidney research as one of the institutes in its system, to be named the institute of kidney and urinary tract diseases.

*Supply***QUESTIONS ON THE ORDER PAPER**

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

• (1010)

The Speaker: Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

* * *

PRIVILEGE

REFERENCE TO STANDING COMMITTEE ON PROCEDURE AND HOUSE AFFAIRS

The House resumed from February 4 consideration of the motion, and of the amendment.

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Minister responsible for the Canadian Wheat Board and Federal Interlocutor for Métis and Non-Status Indians, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, there have been discussions among the parties and I think you would find unanimous consent to adjourn all matters related to the privilege motion until tomorrow so that the business with respect to supply and the motion standing in the name of the official opposition could proceed today. We would take up the matter in relation to the privilege motion tomorrow.

The Speaker: Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[English]

SUPPLY

ALLOTTED DAY—SEX OFFENDER REGISTRY

Mr. Randy White (Langley—Abbotsford, Canadian Alliance) moved:

That, since the government has failed to give effect to the motion adopted by this House on March 13, 2001, calling for the establishment of a sex offender registry by January 30, 2002, the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights be instructed to prepare and bring in a bill reflecting the spirit and intent of that motion;

That the Committee shall make its report to the House no later than June 1, 2002;

That in its report, the Committee shall recommend the principles, scope and general provisions of the said bill, and may include recommendations regarding legislative wording;

That the tabling of a report pursuant to this Order shall be an Order to bring in a bill based thereon; and

That when a Minister of the Crown, in proposing a motion for first reading of a bill, states that the bill is in response to the recommendations contained in a report pursuant to this Order, the second reading and subsequent stages of the bill shall be considered under Government Orders; or

That when a Private Member, in proposing a motion for first reading of a bill, states that the bill is in response to the recommendations contained in a report pursuant to this Order, the second reading and subsequent stages of the bill shall be considered under Private Members' Business and the bill shall be placed immediately in the order of precedence for Private Members' Business as a votable item.

He said: Mr. Speaker, it is extremely disappointing for me to have to stand up in the House today and talk once again about a national

sex offender registry. I thought the government had agreed to dispense with this last March but, alas, that was not the case.

Several serious issues came out of the national sex offender registry. First, the government made a commitment to establish a national sex offender registry, a commitment made to all Canadians and members in the House which it totally ignored.

The motion, which was introduced on March 13 last year, basically stated that by January 30, 2002, which was last week, it would have the thing built. Last week, on January 30, the government stood up and said that there was no need for it. There is a big need for it and we will show that today.

Mr. Speaker, I am splitting my time with my colleague.

I want to introduce two speeches and two issues today. One is a speech on behalf of the official opposition and the other is a speech that will likely be made by the solicitor general. I would like all folks watching and listening to the debate today to listen very closely to the solicitor general's speech. I will read the speech and I will tell the House where he got it from, which is just the old rhetoric.

The other issue that is important here, and I think it is equally important to other parties, is the idea in the House of Commons that a government looks at a motion and then stands up and votes for the motion with absolutely no intention of implementing it. We only have to look at private members' business, supply day motions, which we are talking about today, or any other issue that any other opposition party introduces here. The government says that it will do it. It then goes out and uses its press corps to get all the great press that is permitted it, only for us to see it die in committee, to be completely ignored or the House prorogued and everything dropped. That is the way this government runs.

Let us see what the effect of that little issue is with the national sex offender registry.

The national sex offender registry is so important that the provinces, frustrated with the federal government, are now implementing their own. Ontario has done that. The problem with a province implementing a provincial sex offender registry is that offenders who leave the province of Ontario to go to any other province know they have to report their details. There are no national guidelines or anything like that.

What is required is a software system. Ontario has already offered to give it to the federal government. Therefore that should not be a problem. The government will say that CPIC, the Canadian Police Information Centre, will look after that, but that is not the case. I will show the House that in a few minutes.

Once we have the software, we would need legislation. It does not need to be tough legislation. It could be legislation very similar to that which Ontario has. All it would do is enable the provinces to tell offenders that they shall report any changes to their information, that is, address, change of name, change of phone number and so on, and that if they do not do that they will be fined.

Supply

Let us look at what Ontario does. The offenders' names—legal, alias, nicknames, known names, maiden—are collected along with addresses, phone numbers, photographs and conviction information.

• (1015)

There are built in triggers to advise police services when an offender is non-compliant and living in their jurisdiction or is compliant and in their jurisdiction. Penalties for non-compliance are, for a first offence, a fine of not more than \$25,000 and imprisonment of not more than one year or both, and for subsequent offences a fine of not more than \$25,000 and imprisonment of a term of not more than two years less a day. Ontario says basically that if one does not comply, if one does not make the changes to the registry, then there is a penalty.

This government will not even do that. It did not even have the decency to try to put legislation into the House of Commons to comply with that. Therefore our motion today states that if the government cannot do it and agrees that we need a national sex offender registry, then it should send it all off to a committee and get the committee to do it, get someone to do it. The government should not stand here in the House of Commons, make a commitment and then completely ignore it.

I can understand completely why people are so frustrated with government. It makes commitments, gets all the bragging rights and then it completely ignores the commitments after they are made, time and time again.

Let me tell the House what the solicitor general will say. He will say that Canada's CPIC system, the police information system, is Canada's national sex offender registry. That is totally incorrect. Every province in the country is saying that is not accurate. Every police organization we have found has said it is not accurate. The Canadian police chiefs, the Canadian Police Association and every victims' rights group in the country is saying that CPIC is not a national sex offender registry. How many times do people have to say this? He will say the government is open to improvements. Perhaps it is, but what are they? It had already committed to improvements and did not do a damn thing.

The solicitor general will say that a truly national system can exist only if there is national consensus. There is national consensus. The whole nation is saying that we need a national sex offender registry. The only place where the commitment to a national consensus is not available is here in the House of Commons with the Liberal government. We should think about that when he says that.

He will say that the government has offered to accept current addresses for known sex offenders to be placed in the CPIC database. I say congratulations, that is a darn good idea. The problem is that the moment a person moves from the address that is in the CPIC system no one knows about it. That is why we need to have legislation that says an offender has to register or otherwise there would be a fine.

He will say that the government saw fit to put \$115 million into the CPIC system. Yes, it did, and it has been fighting ever since. We talked to the CPIC people, these people who are trying to work up the police information system. They cannot even get consensus on

what to do, not only on when to do it, and even the people in charge of CPIC admit that it is not a national sex offender registry.

I can only say that I thought integrity was everything in the House of Commons. I thought that when the House of Commons voted unanimously to put in a sex offender registry the government would at least make a try. It did not develop software. It did not implement enabling legislation. It did not live up to its commitment, much like many other commitments that this government said it would live up to. I hope those people who are watching give a real good listen to these people on the other side, because most of it is rhetoric. There will be no sex offender registry unless this government gets off its duff and does something logical and, for a change, with integrity.

• (1020)

Mr. Peter MacKay (Pictou—Antigonish—Guysborough, PC/DR): Mr. Speaker, I commend my colleague from Langley—Abbotsford for the work he has done on this file. I wonder if he has turned his mind to the possibility of utilizing existing infrastructure in the way of computers and a registry system. He has alluded to the CPIC system, a national registry with respect to criminal records and warrants. Of course any system, as the hon. member will be quick to acknowledge, is only as good as the information that is in the particular system.

I have a question for the hon. member. I do not want to confuse the issue or mix messages here, but has the hon. member or anyone in his employ, in the research he has had available to him, ever looked at the possibility of using the infrastructure of the disastrous national firearms registry that exists, with the hundreds of millions of dollars that have been pumped into the system, and which will not work because people will not voluntarily register, especially Hell's Angels? Has he looked at the possibility of using that computer data system, that technology, that national registry, to apply to, at least in some way, registering sex offenders? Is it something that might be a practical use, at least, of the resources, the hundreds of millions of taxpayers' dollars that have been pumped into this useless registry system that was ill-fated from its very beginning? The government told people that it would cost \$84 million and it is now in the range of \$500 million or \$600 million and counting. Is it possible to apply that infrastructure to a more practical and more realistic purpose that would allow police, parole officers and Canadians generally to have this national sex offender registry envisaged by the hon. member?

Mr. Randy White: Mr. Speaker, that is a very good question from my colleague. That registry was supposed to be a stand alone registry and I think it is, but the big stand alone is the cost of it and the non-compliance. It is possible to use that system or a similar system to track sex offenders. Again the problem is that I do not think the government has the wherewithal, the philosophical bent, as it were, to make people register. I think people actually believe that it is some kind of infringement on their rights.

Supply

In fact we found out a couple of days ago from the Ontario government that people have to be told ahead of time that they must register. The Ontario police cannot get the assistance of the Correctional Service Canada to tell inmates on their way out of the prison that they must comply and register. The service tells Ontario police "You have to do it because we're not co-operating". That is how bad this is. The reason is that the government does not want the rights of individuals, criminals, sex offenders, quite frankly, invaded by telling them that they must comply.

To try to answer the question, I think it could be a very similar system, if not that system. We have talked to the gun registry people. They are so confused that they cannot even handle the gun system, much less sex offenders, but the software itself and the development are free because Ontario has said "We'll give it to you". It is a stand-alone system and it is not a big system. I think the difficulty is that the government really and truly believes that it is more of a crime to invade the privacy of a sex offender in order to make sure he reports to a system than it is to protect people from sex offenders. I cannot believe that I live in a country with a government that is so far off base on such an issue.

• (1025)

Mr. Kevin Sorenson (Crowfoot, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, I stood in the House almost a year ago in support of the Canadian Alliance motion requesting the establishment of a national sex offender registry. During that same period of time on the other side of the House the Liberal government unanimously stood in support of its commitment to set up a registry by January 30, 2002.

As of today, February 5, 2002, we do not have a national sex offender registry in this country. We do not have one because this Liberal government has failed again to meet another one of its commitments. It failed in this regard as it has failed to keep many of its 1993 red book promises.

The subject of today's motion is to have the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights prepare and bring in a bill establishing a registry given the fact that this government has failed to do so in spite of its promise and in spite of its commitment.

The motion we presented last March and which government members voted in favour of was the establishment of a national registry containing the names and addresses of convicted sex offenders. We proposed that every sex offender be required to register in person at his or her local police station at least once a year and provide any updated information, including a change in address.

This proposal is nothing new. Ontario already has such a registry. Christopher's law, or Bill C-31, received royal assent in April 2000, establishing a registry to:

enhance public safety by providing law enforcement agencies with a modern, reliable and effective electronic tool and support services to track sex offenders in our communities and to improve the investigation of crimes of a sexual nature.

I also stood in the House last March cautioning members on the other side, particularly those members who were in the House prior to 1993, to carefully consider their position on a national sex offender registry. I did so because I had a copy of an April 1993 Liberal document entitled "A Liberal Perspective on Crime and Justice Issues".

Contained within this document were a number of recommendations put forward by the then official opposition, the Liberal Party, to do the following, and I quote, "to combat Canada's growing violent crime problem". One of the Liberals' very own post-government recommendations was, and again I quote from that document, "to support the establishment of a national registry of convicted child abusers".

The rationale for this recommendation, and again I will quote directly from this Liberal document, states:

Sex offenders represent almost 20 per cent of the incarcerated population and 10 per cent of the conditionally released population. These numbers are not an accurate representation as they include only those sentenced to two years or more in prison. Actual figures are much higher.

Over the past five years there has been a 20.4 per cent increase in the rate of admission of sex offenders. Evidently more and more sex offenders will be reintegrating into Canadian communities.

The document goes on, however, to state that:

Repeat sex offenders are more than twice as likely to commit further sex offences, much more likely to violate conditional release conditions and more likely than any other offenders to reoffend with a non-sexual offence. However, treatment programs for sexual offenders are sorely lacking...It is the norm, when it should be the exception, that convicted sexual offenders return to communities without any counselling or rehabilitation therapy.

Much of the information used by the Liberals to support their 1993 recommendations for establishing a sex offender registry remains the very same today. Nothing has changed.

• (1030)

In fact, a review of the research and the website of the statistics branch of the Correctional Service of Canada reveals that the majority of the studies done on sex offenders and recidivism rates are outdated. The statistics in most cases are more than 10 years old.

I am confident that findings today would be similar to those findings in the late 1980s and 1990s indicating that sex offenders have one of the highest recidivism rates of any criminal group, with an estimated 40% reoffending within five years of their release.

In 1990 the ministry of the solicitor general struck a working group on the management and treatment of sex offenders, "as a result of a number of factors, including the rapid growth of the federal sex offender population". The working group reported its findings and recommendations in March 1990. These were some of the key findings.

First, offender treatment programs have shown limited results.

Second, practitioners in the field of sex offender treatment do not claim to cure sex offenders. Rather the treatment strategy is to manage the risk of reoffending.

Third, there are not enough experts to meet the demand for sex offender treatment and the limitations of treatment are recognized.

Supply

This research, which was based on research produced by the Correctional Service of Canada, clearly demonstrates why for the sake of our children we need a registry. We need to do everything within our power as parliamentarians to protect our children from repeat sex offenders.

I will read to the House a copy of a letter that was addressed to the solicitor general, copied and sent to me. Before I read it I would like to assure the House that I obtained the permission of the author, Jim Stephenson, the father of Christopher Stephenson, the Christopher in Ontario's Christopher's law, to read the letter. He said:

Anna and I both thank you for taking the time to meet with us earlier this week. As you know, our purpose in speaking with you was to explain why CPIC is incapable of providing the enforceable protection of a specific sex offender registry and why national action is essential. I regret that we were unsuccessful in that effort and you continue to take advice from your officials that legislated compliance is neither necessary nor permissible. They are wrong Minister; and I only hope that no child dies before you decide to listen to people other than those whose preoccupation is defending the status quo.

During the meeting, D/Sgt. Muise from Ontario's Office for Victims of Crime raised the additional issue of the difficulty Ontario was experiencing in trying to arrange the seemingly simple task of linking with the Federal Offender Management System. I was encouraged to note your surprise at this and your direction to—

In the letter to the solicitor general Mr. Stephenson names the official. I will just call him the official.

Mr. Stephenson went on to say:

— [the official] of your Ministry to resolve this problem.

Following our meeting, my wife and I, together with D/Sgt. Muise further discussed the matter of a national sex offender registry with your official. We were sufficiently shocked at his conduct and remarks, in your absence, that I felt you should be apprised of them as they reflect extremely poorly on you as the Minister. Despite your previous public statement that “governments must continue to give victims more of a voice in the criminal justice system”, our own expressed desire to be included in the determination of appropriate registry format, and your acknowledgment that we would continue to work together, [your official] informed us that our involvement with the Working Group would not be possible as our presence would be “disruptive”. He further stated that the group of officials operated, to use his words, “like an old boys' club” and people like us would not be welcome.

Please be assured that our only interest in continuing these discussions is to prevent other Canadians from having to undergo the nightmare that befell our family when federal correctional officials released and then failed to supervise the repeat child rapist that abducted and murdered our son. Mr. Minister, unlike [your official] and his “colleagues”, my wife and I belong to a club of a very different sort where membership is unwilling and comes at a price that no one should have to bear. If this is the attitude of federal officials, it is small wonder that Canada lacks commitment to a National Sex Offender Registry and that public confidence in the justice system is continually questioned.

Finally Minister, I have learned that [your official's] “club” has scheduled a one-day meeting next week in the resort community of Banff, Alberta; a choice of locales I suggest speaks volumes about their priorities. I am certain that I could arrange the use of OPP facilities in Orillia where the Ontario Sex Offender Registry is housed—

● (1035)

What more can I say? Where is the commitment of the government? Where are its priorities? Certainly Canada is begging and calling out for a national sex offender registry. When will the solicitor general listen?

Mr. Randy White (Langley—Abbotsford, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask my colleague this, since the solicitor general is listening. A sex offender registry of any sort cannot be implemented unless legislation enabling the registry itself to operate works. That is, the government must develop legislation to mandate sex offenders to report, with penalties if they do not report.

I would like to ask my colleague about the philosophical bent of the Liberal government. Does he think that one of the reasons why the government reneged on its promise, and the solicitor general reneged on his promise with his vote in the House to implement a registry, is it sees legislation mandating sex offenders to report as an infringement on their rights?

Mr. Kevin Sorenson: Mr. Speaker, first, I want to thank the member for Langley—Abbotsford for his hard work in understanding what is needed. I failed to do that in my speech. He has travelled around through prisons and has met with different victims groups. I know his passion for doing the right thing has been very evident in the formation of this.

I will give the Liberal government some credit. I believe it understands that the sex offender recidivism rate is extremely high. It acknowledged that last year. It acknowledged that we need to do something. In 1993 it had the commitment to do it. Toughening the criminal justice system was one of the platforms on which it ran and eventually won the 1993 election.

However we have seen no commitment in the House since then. We talk about recidivism rates of 40%. In the whole equation, what the government has not factored in is the victim. It is so bent on rehabilitation and reintegration, which are imperative and foundations of corrections services, that it has forgotten about the rights of the victims.

I have met with parents from my riding and have heard about their children being lured over the Internet by pedophiles and by sex offenders. I see the heartbreak and listen to many of them weeping. The part of the equation that the government has forgotten is the victim.

Our prisons are full of sex offenders. When they are pushed through the revolving door of our corrections services and our prison system back onto the street, because we have a reintegration principle and a high rehabilitation principle, we see families torn apart by the offenses committed against their children who fall victim to individuals who are not on a workable, working sex offender registry.

As we have heard in the House many times, the member from Langley already has brought out how outdated CPIC is and how it is not working. I am sure the solicitor general will admit that police are telling him that CPIC is not working.

The facts are that reoffending is up in the country and we need to protect society. The protection of society needs to be the guiding principle in all criminal justice. Now we have a government that is bringing in other laws in the Young Offenders Act which are highly questionable on even the equality of all before law. It leaves me wondering where the government is headed.

We need a registry. We have spoken about it for a year. We had a commitment from the government, but again we have seen no action.

Supply

•(1040)

Hon. Lawrence MacAulay (Solicitor General of Canada, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise to speak to this motion today. I will be splitting my time with my hon. colleague from Ottawa Centre.

My hon. colleague is right about one thing. Last March we did support an opposition motion to establish a national sex offender registry. However my hon. colleague is wrong when he says that we have not complied with that motion. In fact, the opposite is true.

Let me repeat what I said on March 13. I said that we had a proven and reliable sex offender registry through CPIC, the Canadian Police Information Centre. CPIC is the national registry of all convicted offenders, including sex offenders. In other words, we have already complied with the opposition motion. In fact, we have met the deadline of my hon. colleague long before he ever brought that motion before the House of Commons.

What I also said at that time was that the government was committed to going even further. I rise in my place today to bring hon. members up to date on our project.

Mr. Randy White: Same speech you read the last time.

Hon. Lawrence MacAulay: As I have said many times in the House—

The Deputy Speaker: Order, please. I know there are some strongly held views. We have heard other members speak from one side of the House and we will hear other views from the government side at this time. I would hope that we would give each other the respect to hear each other. The Chair will turn its attention to questions and comments at the appropriate time.

Hon. Lawrence MacAulay: Mr. Speaker, you are absolutely right. My opposition colleagues should listen to some facts.

CPIC is a solid database of police information that can be accessed by police agencies all across the country. It is highly reliable because it is based on fingerprints and not on whether an offender complies.

I said in March that the government was open to finding ways to improve CPIC as our national sex offender registry. I am pleased to inform the House that we have done this and will continue. In September I announced \$2 million to develop a national sex offender database in CPIC. The database will be linked to other criminal history and police information already contained in CPIC. It will be operational by November of this year.

These enhancements will allow police across the country to perform searches in a number of different ways: by address, name, offence, tattoo or scar, and region. The improvements will give every police force in Canada around the clock instant access to information about sex offenders who are registered in the sex offender category. I am confident the changes will make a significant contribution to CPIC as our national sex offender registry.

That is not all. We have also been working closely with the provinces and territories because there can be a national solution only with a national consensus. A national solution means a system that works well in Moose Jaw, Saskatchewan; Toronto, Ontario; or

Edmundston, New Brunswick. An effective system can only exist if jurisdictions work together. That is why we are working so closely with the provinces and territories.

Since last March the Minister of Justice and I have discussed the issue of the sex offender registry with our provincial and territorial colleagues on two occasions. In addition, a team of senior federal, provincial and territorial officials has been working to establish a consensus on some of the basic questions of cost, criteria, compatibility, enforcement, training, and jurisdictional responsibilities. These are important issues.

Although my hon. colleague from Langley—Abbotsford may think he has all the answers I do not think he even has all the questions. What the issue really needs is leadership. We have shown leadership in our commitment to give the police the tools they need to do the job. We have shown leadership by putting money where our mouth is and investing in CPIC. We have shown leadership by creating a sex offender category within CPIC.

I have spoken about the issue a number of times with my provincial and territorial counterparts. I will meet with them next week in Moncton to talk about the progress we have made and the next steps we must take together. We will continue to find ways to improve but we will not blindly impose the hon. member's views on the provinces and territories. We will not impose on jurisdictions, especially smaller ones, a system they do not support or cannot afford. The government has instead taken action on a number of fronts to protect the most vulnerable in our society, especially children.

As early as 1994 we conducted extensive consultations with individuals and organizations with special responsibility for the care and protection of our children. These have included children's aid societies, school boards, Big Brothers and Big Sisters organizations, Volunteer Canada, police, victims groups and many other groups across the country. They have told us sex offender registries, like those in the United States, would contribute little to the safety of children. What they asked for and what we have delivered is a made in Canada solution that targets abusers who seek positions of trust with children and other vulnerable groups.

•(1045)

The national screening system was launched in September 1994 by the Minister of Justice, the Minister of Health and the Solicitor General of Canada. It is the result of effective collaboration among police, child caring agencies and the federal government. CPIC provides criminal records to local police forces who help these agencies conduct criminal record checks. At last count almost a million searches had been done on behalf of volunteer groups across the country. It is an important tool that protects the most vulnerable from the most dangerous. It is only one example of the measures we have taken for the safety of Canadians.

Supply

We have created a new form of long term supervision for sex offenders after they have completed their normal sentences. A national flagging system has been developed with provincial partners so prosecutors can identify offenders who should be considered for dangerous offender status. Police bonds allow us to put special conditions on high risk offenders even when they are not under sentence. With these measures we have imposed tougher controls on sex offenders and made Canadians safer.

We will continue to show leadership on the file. We have kept our promise to work with our provincial and territorial partners. We have kept our promise to enhance CPIC. We will continue to take whatever measures we need to make sure Canadians are safer.

However we want something that will work. We want to go forward, not backward. Imposing legislation without a national consensus would get us nowhere. That is why we cannot support my hon. colleague's motion.

The government has and will continue to do its utmost to protect Canadians. We have made exceptional progress since March and will continue to move forward toward the effective solutions we know will work for all Canadians.

● (1050)

Mr. Randy White (Langley—Abbotsford, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, each day I am in the House I get more and more disappointed. Listening to that almost made me physically sick.

This fellow does not know what he is talking about. The minister says he is working closely with his colleagues. Quite frankly, every one of his colleagues he talks about, the provinces, school boards, police associations and victims groups, are saying this does not and will not work. The government does not have the fortitude or the stamina to stand up and make sex offenders report to the registry. That is the problem.

We put a motion forward today to say that in developing a sex offender registry we need enabling legislation. The government needs to go to sex offenders and say they must report, otherwise there will be consequences. This makes sense because it would update the registry continually. If the government is so all fired up about developing a registry it must surely agree there is a mandate for sex offenders to report.

Will the solicitor general stand and tell us, never mind the damn rhetoric, that he will need sex offenders to report continuously on their personal changes when the sex offender registry is implemented? That is what the motion is about. He should stand and tell us it is necessary.

Hon. Lawrence MacAulay: Mr. Speaker, I listened to both my hon. colleagues in the opposition. One of my hon. colleagues indicated that CPIC is outdated and not worth it. The hon. member says CPIC is not a valuable tool.

My hon. colleague for Langley—Abbotsford wants me not to bother working with the provinces and territories. He says we should never mind co-operation and not work together. He says we should take no pass at the progress we have made to this date or at the system we have put in place—

The Deputy Speaker: Order, please.

Hon. Lawrence MacAulay: Mr. Speaker, I am disappointed my hon. colleague does not want to listen to the facts. He wants to impose certain conditions on the provinces and territories. We got where we are today because of co-operation with the provinces and territories. Why does my hon. colleague want to throw all that out the window? Where we are today is much beyond where he would have us.

My hon. colleague says we did not comply with his motion. We did comply with his motion. My hon. colleague does not understand what his motion was. His previous motion was that we establish a sex offender registry. Everyone convicted of a sex offence is registered on CPIC. We have established a new category. We have established a large amount of criteria to make sure the RCMP and other police forces can search for these individuals by region and conviction.

● (1055)

Mr. Peter MacKay (Pictou—Antigonish—Guysborough, PC/DR): Mr. Speaker, I thank the solicitor general for being here and participating in the debate. I will be the first to say there have been improvements, some of which the solicitor general has pointed out: the flagging system that passed through the House recently; long term supervision; and the ability of the RCMP, prosecutors and municipal police to identify high risk offenders. We are quick to embrace all these things as good ideas.

Yet in his remarks the solicitor general made reference to jurisdictional concerns and the need for national consensus. First, sex offenders do not respect jurisdictional concerns. They do not respect the law, period. They are predatory. References have been made to the high rate of recidivism among sex offenders.

My question pertains to the minister's reference to national consensus. My first thought was that national consensus did not enter the government's mind at all when it imposed a gun registry, particularly on rural parts of the country which the solicitor general himself represents.

Where is this national consensus? We are hearing completely contradictory evidence from provincial governments and attorneys general with respect to the federal government's approach to implementing a national sex offender registry. They are calling for a separate and distinct stand-alone sex offender registry, not something rolled into the CPIC system.

Yes, what we have is better than nothing at all, but it does not provide the quick access to information required by police working in the field. There is no national consensus as the solicitor general would have us believe. How does he respond to that? What consensus is he speaking of?

Hon. Lawrence MacAulay: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate my hon. colleague having at least accepted the value of CPIC and how important it is for police forces in Canada. It is the envy of police forces around the world.

Supply

We are where we are today because of consensus with the provinces and territories. Compatibility, enforcement, costs and many other issues must be dealt with, and they have been dealt with to this point by co-operation between federal and provincial and territorial officials. This has brought us to where we are, which is much beyond where my hon. colleague from Langley—Abbotsford had us in his last motion.

The government has put many improvements in place, dollar wise and technology wise, to make sure the country is a safe place for our society and for children in particular.

Mr. Mac Harb (Ottawa Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it gives me great pleasure and honour to stand in the House today to discuss the need for effective information handling on sex offenders.

It is important to recognize that the Government of Canada is moving forward with a comprehensive solution to enhance public safety and increase the confidence of Canadians in our criminal justice system. It will be of interest to my colleagues to know that this would deal not only with sex offenders but with all offenders.

In 1999 an integrated justice information action plan was launched to create the Canada Public Safety Information Network, CPSIN. CPSIN is fundamentally about networking and sharing information electronically across the many jurisdictions in Canada's criminal justice system. All the practitioners within this system, police officers, parole or correctional officers, prosecutors, or customs and immigration officials at the border, have one thing in common: They need current, complete and timely information in order to make informed decisions that preserve public safety.

Included is information on sex offenders as well as critical information on violent offenders. What the government is doing in its integrated justice action plan is first and foremost enhancing public safety through the elimination of obstacles to quick and effective information sharing across the criminal justice system. This means being better equipped to locate and capture criminals, including sex offenders, as well as process them through the criminal justice business cycle. It also entails getting connected both locally and nationally.

In this future environment there would be a new tool to connect these sources, called a national criminal justice index, or NCJI. Through this index data could be gathered instantaneously and electronically from across the country and potentially from around the globe whether on sex offenders, terrorists, organized crime or any other type of criminal. Putting all the various pieces together electronically would create the Canada Public Safety Information Network which would support the information sharing that is crucial to ensuring public safety.

Within CPSIN police officers as well as other criminal justice stakeholders would be able to do a number of things that they could not do at the present time, such as: determine the correctional status of any person; access the complete criminal history, including sexual offences, of any person, including provincial infractions; and view a judge's sentencing rationale for a decision immediately upon being rendered.

At the federal level two key components of the initiative for the Royal Canadian Mounted Police would include, first, a renewal of

the Canadian Police Information Centre, CPIC. CPIC is a national tool used by virtually every law enforcement official in Canada, including police, customs officers, correctional officials, immigration officers and various others. CPIC renewal would be the first critical step in the commitment to link criminal justice information. CPIC is accessed over 150 million times every year. The modernization of CPIC is well under way, being delivered in phases from the year 1999 and to be completed in 2005.

Second, it would include the police reporting and occurrence system, or PROS. This system would provide direct support to front line RCMP officers in their response to service calls, investigation of occurrences, the processing of individuals and the preparation of essential information for the RCMP, courts and external agencies by simplifying the process and reducing the time spent by officers on administrative and paperwork functions.

● (1100)

The conditional release system of the National Parole Board would provide enhanced support to assist National Parole Board members in making fully informed conditional release decisions in support of public safety, including those pertaining to sex offenders seeking parole.

Correctional Service of Canada would renew its offender management system through the use of modern technology to facilitate the exchange of information with criminal justice partners. Among other things, this would give it a better tool to prepare sex offenders and others for eventual reintegration into the communities following their sentence.

These systems are large and complex projects which would take several years to fully complete. To be successful, we would require these organizations to work together. It is important to establish a strong sense of partnership to have effective mechanisms for co-ordination. The machinery, as the minister indicated, is in place at the federal level and work has begun with the provinces toward a national approach.

Thus far, the co-operation between the partner organizations has been excellent, based on a shared sense of what is important and what is necessary. Everyone involved believes that they must move ahead as quickly as possible with an integrated justice information system. Much of this work is pioneering, for example, the work being done on data standards to facilitate the exchange of data between agencies.

It is important to note that the events of September 11 have made it all the more imperative for the government to move ahead quickly in advancing this integrated justice information initiative. Although this is not something that can be realized overnight, great strides are being made to achieve the complex but eminently worthwhile goal of an integrated justice information system.

The Canada Public Safety Information Network would be extremely helpful in addressing the handling of sex offender information as well as the information pertaining to all other criminals and offenders in Canada. We will continue, as the minister has stated, to work to ensure that we have the best possible tools available to protect Canadians.

The solicitor general explained a little earlier the importance of working together with our provincial and territorial partners on these files. We cannot have an effective national approach without a national consensus. That is why we cannot support the motion at the present time.

• (1105)

Mr. Ken Epp (Elk Island, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, I must confess that when this member stood up to speak I could not help but recall that he is the same member who tabled a private member's bill in this House to legalize prostitution. Here he is talking about the wonderful work that the Liberal government would be doing to reduce the freedom of sexual predators. It just is not happening. What the government says and what it does are two different things. I would like to ask this member a specific question.

CPIC is inadequate. Notwithstanding what the solicitor general said, it fails on a number of important points. For example, a sexual predator or a rapist can go to a different province from where the crime is committed. There is no necessity for him to report that he is changing his address. CPIC shows him as living wherever he was living at the time his offence was committed. I am using he because most of the time these are men. If he moves to a different province, there is no requirement for him to phone anyone and say that he is moving to Manitoba and to tell the people in Winnipeg that he is now there and that they better keep their children safe. There is no requirement for that.

Does the hon. member not agree that there should be legislation which says that this person must declare his new address when he moves? Does he agree with that or does he not?

Mr. Mac Harb: Mr. Speaker, my colleague may have inadvertently misled the House in stating that the bill I proposed dealt with legalizing prostitution. That was not the case. The bill merely gave the provinces the right to decide whether or not they wanted to legalize prostitution. I hope the hon. member will have an opportunity to correct that for the record.

I hope the hon. member was listening when the federal government stated it had already made an unequivocal commitment to establish a national system in order to collect, deal with, prosecute and do whatever was necessary in order to ensure the safety of Canadians. The minister stated that the government has already put in place \$2 million in terms of capital funding to establish a more effective system and an additional \$400,000 has been put in place to support the operational aspect of the system.

My colleague has to also bear in mind that we must have a collective team approach. We have the provinces as partners. They have their own objectives and goals. We want to hear their concerns and what it is they would like to see in this system through a national approach.

Supply

It is important for us to look at other issues which I know my colleague may not be interested in. Potentially, the charter of rights and privacy rights might be involved in the development of such a national approach. We must look at the issue of jurisdiction, whether it is federal, provincial or municipal. My colleagues in some cases are not interested in that.

If I were my colleague on the other side, I would have declared victory already. The government has supported the objective of the motion. I would declare victory and move on. The government has gone beyond what was in the motion and extended the system far beyond what was called for in the original motion.

If he wants me to tell him now what the approach will be at the end of the day, then we may as well not consult at all. However the government will not do that. The government will ensure that the different partners at all levels, different agencies, including police officers, RCMP officers on the front line, are collectively involved in the development of a national approach. That is what the minister was saying and that is what the government is saying.

My colleague should stand up and congratulate the government, rather than standing up and attacking it.

• (1110)

Mr. Peter MacKay (Pictou—Antigonish—Guysborough, PC/DR): Mr. Speaker, I will not congratulate the hon. member. I will point out that what he has told us about the government accepting and implementing the motion is the complete opposite of the truth.

In fact, what the new system does not do is allow for updated information that could be used in a preventive way by the police and the communities. The system simply does not do that. It does not take into account the mobility of offenders. Therefore, much of the prevention is lost. The system is only as good as the information that is entered into it. Unfortunately, these changes in location are currently not available under the CPIC system. Therefore, it is failing. It is not up to snuff. It is not what is needed at this time.

Mr. Mac Harb: Mr. Speaker, there is a connotation that we must establish a parallel system and that is not the intent. We must work within the existing system. The government is specifically working on requirements to upgrade, update and improve the existing system. Therefore my colleague cannot turn around and say the government has not taken note of the opposition motion. It has, but it has exceeded that too.

If the hon. member wants the government to abandon the existing system, the answer is no. The system is working. We can ensure that it would work better through consultations with the provinces and the territories.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Pierrette Venne (Saint-Bruno—Saint-Hubert, BQ): Mr. Speaker, if I said I was pleased to intervene today in this debate on the official opposition's motion calling for the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights to be instructed to prepare and bring in a bill calling for the establishment of a sex offender registry, it would be a mere sham. I would just be playing along with the game the government played on us on March 13, 2001.

On that date, the House was debating a motion by the Canadian Alliance, which read as follows:

Supply

That the government establish a national sex offender registry by January 1, 2002.

This was clear, yet here we are on February 5 revisiting the same matter, because the government has done nothing to follow up on this motion. Yet the solicitor general of the day, and the man still in that position today despite all the speculation that was running rampant about him before the last cabinet shuffle, which had him going to the Senate, concluded his speech that day with "I have absolutely no problem in supporting the opposition motion".

If the solicitor general had indeed read the motion introduced by my colleagues from the Alliance, and more importantly, if he had listened carefully to their speeches, he would have realized that he supported a motion requesting the creation of a separate registry of sexual offenders, rather than some attempt to revamp, at the cost of millions of dollars, a system known as the Canadian Police Information Centre, which the provincial ministers of justice admit is clearly insufficient.

As if this were not enough, in addition to being inadequate for the needs being discussed today, the system's shortcomings when it comes to protecting privacy were revealed yesterday, by the media. We learned that Citizenship and Immigration employees had accessed the CPIC database for purely personal purposes. Given the very specific nature of the information that could be contained in a registry of sexual offenders, this incident demonstrates the importance of creating a separate database with restricted access in order to avoid any kind of abuse.

Not only has the solicitor general failed to follow through on his support for this motion, but furthermore, for historic and contextual considerations, it is important to remind the House and those who are watching—to be sure that they understand what kind of government we are dealing with—that during the vote, not one member present in the House voted against this motion. In other words, all of the Liberal members present in the House voted for the motion.

Clearly, this government respects absolutely nothing. We already knew that it did not respect the privilege of parliamentarians to express themselves in debate; witness their invoking closure for the eighth time, yesterday when we were debating Bill C-7. No more than it respects the witnesses who do us the favour of sharing their expertise with us in the different committees. It is the same thing when it comes to provincial consensus. Add to this a minister who misleads the House and we have yet another glimpse into those who lead this government.

However, this time the Liberals have reached a new low by not even respecting their own vote. There again, members opposite may tell us that the fact that they supported that motion is just a myth or, better still, that it was a scheme by sovereignists. Why not? Given the current situation, it is obvious that ridicule never killed anyone.

As regards the substantive issues relating to the motion calling for the establishment of a sex offender registry, from which today's motion stems, the Bloc Québécois remains convinced that it is an interesting idea and that such a project could prove very constructive in terms of protecting society from a very specific type of crime. Of course, the establishment of such a registry would allow us to exert some control but, more importantly, it would also prevent sex

offenders who have served their sentences and who want to be rehabilitated back into society from reoffending.

Again, the position of the Bloc Québécois goes well beyond mere partisanship and party line, because it primarily reflects the will of the people. This idea is also supported by the Canadian Police Association, the Canadian Resource Centre for Victims of Crime, the provincial ministers of justice, as I mentioned before, and all the opposition parties in this House.

• (1115)

Moreover, up until January 1, we were naive to the point of having confidence in democracy and its institutions, and to believe that the government was also on board. Once again, this Liberal government fooled members of parliament and, consequently, the public.

Considering the government's lack of action in that area since March 13 of last year, I want to reiterate my comments on the major principles that should guide the establishment of a sex offender registry.

First, we must take into consideration the particular profile of the sex offender, who is often left to himself and could therefore reoffend, since this type of crime is primarily motivated by deeply repressed sexual urges.

We must also consider the vulnerability of the victims of sex crimes, particularly children, who are easy prey for sexual predators.

Sexual crimes, whether the victims are children or adults, often destroy lives. These people have gone through hell and may possibly go through hell for the rest of their lives, with all the consequences that one can imagine.

It is therefore imperative for all necessary steps to be taken to protect society from the potential risk of recidivism. Concrete actions must be taken in order to protect the public from repeat offenders. This is the only way of appeasing the public's strong reaction to the odious nature of these crimes.

We have reached a point where the families and friends of the victims of this type of crime take the law into their own hands. One example of this is the Many affair, where a father badly beat up the person who had attacked his son. There is also the instance of the retaliatory lynching in Laval of the presumed attacker of an 11 year old girl.

What is even more worrisome in this state of affairs is that, while the public does not openly endorse such behaviour, it still shows understanding of such acts.

That understanding translates into sympathy for the victim's relatives when they resort to this far west style of justice. Under these circumstances, there is not far to go between understanding and legitimizing acts that are contrary to the principles of a law-abiding state.

There is, therefore, an urgent need to develop programs and mechanisms which will restore citizens' trust in the criminal justice system.

We therefore feel that the establishment of a sex offender registry, which would include the offender's photo, name, address and date of birth, and a complete list of all the sex crimes committed, would allow a more thorough follow-up on these people.

By thus requiring offenders to inform local police forces of their whereabouts, society could keep an eye on these offenders and thus reduce, or at least monitor, the threat they pose to our community.

Second, the registry must be maintained by the responsible authorities, in this case, police forces, which, along with certain categories of stakeholders specifically listed in the legislative framework establishing the registry, would be the only people allowed to consult it.

The information in this registry would have to remain confidential and on no account be available to the general population. A consultation procedure and a rigorous framework for the new powers given police would have to be drawn up so as not to create yet another problem in the form of abuse.

There is therefore no question of the general public being allowed to consult the information in this database. The purpose of the registry is essentially to ensure effective follow-up of offenders and not to create a state of alarm, which could traumatize the public or launch witch hunts.

Let us remember that such a registry must serve a dual purpose: protecting the public and providing a means of rehabilitation.

In the latter regard, a registry that stigmatized an individual within a community would be very harmful and eliminate practically any chance of rehabilitation, which comes about through an individual's return to the community, not through his exclusion from it.

● (1120)

Incidentally, the following are included among the guiding principles of the criminal justice system, and I quote: first at all times the rights and dignity of all those involved in the correctional process must be respected and upheld; second, the offender remains a member of society and forfeits only those rights and privileges which are expressly taken away by statute or as a necessary consequence of the custody and control imposed by the court; third, correctional policies and practices must not deny the offender the hope of regaining status as a free citizen; fourth, correctional agencies have the responsibility to assist the offender to develop or maintain positive and supportive personal and family relations; fifth, correctional objectives should be met through shared responsibility and co-operative action by the community, correctional workers, other segments of the criminal justice system and the offenders themselves.

Furthermore, among the many goals and objectives behind criminal sanctions is that of promoting reintegration into the community. Therefore, the undeniable principles that guide our criminal justice system are rehabilitation and reintegration. These goals cannot be reached overnight. The offender must go through a

Supply

long process, which must include a period of supervision and support.

It is imperative that there be long term follow-up, which would require an offender to report in for a period to be determined in accordance with the sentence handed down. Obviously, the stiffer the sentence, the longer the period during which he would have to report to police authorities.

It is understood that the offenders concerned will have to be informed that their names will remain in the registry for a set period of time.

In conclusion, it is now commonly known that in most cases sex offenders present a high risk of recidivism. This is much more than just a popular myth. It is borne out by research and by the experience of those working directly in the field. This is why this phenomenon deserves a special approach.

Furthermore, it is easy to understand that a sex offender registry would be an integral part of the rehabilitation process, which should in theory end with an application for pardon. Of course, we would have to make sure that police forces have all the necessary information to do proper follow-up and be able to act quickly before the worst happens. All this would be in the best interests of the offender, victims and society in general.

The Bloc Québécois supports this motion and will be voting in favour.

● (1125)

[*English*]

Mr. Bill Blaikie (Winnipeg—Transcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the origin of today's motion is really the disappointment experienced by the opposition collectively but particularly by the official opposition in respect of the government's failure to act on a motion that was passed in the House on Tuesday, March 13, 2001.

At the beginning of my remarks I would like to reflect on what happened on that day. If members will excuse what may seem an overly narcissistic exercise, I will refer to some of the things I had to say on that day because, plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose.

On March 13, 2001, I said:

Mr. Speaker, first of all I would like to say that I am tempted to call quorum.

I went on to say that the idea of an opposition day is to provide the opposition with an opportunity to put forward points of view to which the government listens. It was created to replace the estimate system that existed in the House up until 1969 which required government members to stay in the House, particularly the minister whose estimates were being considered, until such time as members of the opposition were satisfied that all the questions they had with respect to the particular department had been answered. It was a discipline on the government.

I also said on March 13, 2001, that when I looked across the way and saw only 3 government members out of 175 it did not exactly inspire me to think that there was a great zest in the House of Commons for parliament or, for that matter, for the principle of the government listening to what opposition members had to say on an opposition day.

Supply

Things may have improved a little. I think I see five. Perhaps they are getting the hint. They are starting to show up on this side of the curtains but they have not even taken their seats yet.

Mr. Bob Speller: How many of your own colleagues are there listening to you, Bill? How many NDP are watching you?

Mr. Bill Blaikie: Mr. Speaker, we can always tell when we throw a stone into a pack of wild animals whether we have hit something because they start to yelp. There is a bit of yelping going on over there.

Just out of respect for the tradition I established on that day, I think I will call quorum so that government members have an opportunity to listen to what opposition members have to say on this matter.

And the count having been taken:

● (1130)

The Deputy Speaker: We have a quorum.

Mr. Bill Blaikie: Mr. Speaker, I will return to my remarks but perhaps government members will return to the lobby. Lunch is not even being served back there. I did not know that what I had to say was so offensive, but perhaps Liberals do not like to listen to the truth. I can understand that, particularly when we want to talk about how they do not live up to commitments they make in the House, something about which I also spoke on March 13, 2001, the last time this matter came up. It is almost like a replay.

Mr. Peter MacKay: It is like "Groundhog Day".

Mr. Bill Blaikie: Yes, it reminds me of that movie. Parliament is a lot like the movie where the guy keeps getting up and the same thing happens over and over again. That is true with respect to the Liberals when it comes to certain things.

I say to my colleagues in the Alliance that the disappointment they are expressing today is a product of perhaps wishful thinking combined with a little naiveté, combined with not listening to what I had to say on March 13, 2001.

On that date I said that I listened with interest to the solicitor general's reply and that I might be mistaken but I had the impression he was speaking against the motion. At the end of his speech the last time this matter came up he announced that the government would be supporting the motion. The hon. member from White Rock was somewhat surprised at that time.

Subsequently I reminded the House of a similar experience I had when the government supported an opposition day motion on February 9, 1999, having to do with the creation of a national ban on the bulk export of water. We were all very happy because we thought we had accomplished something. We thought there had been unanimity in the House with respect to such a ban, and what happened?

An hon. member: Nothing.

Mr. Bill Blaikie: Nothing with respect to a national ban, but the very next day the government announced a policy that was completely at odds with what it had agreed to the day before. It announced a policy that relied entirely on the provinces bringing in

provincial bans on the bulk export of water and made no mention whatever of the need for or the legitimacy of a national ban on the bulk export of water.

I say to my Alliance colleagues that they were warned at that time about the insincerity of the government with respect to this motion. As I listened to the solicitor general then he seemed to be saying that the only reason he was voting for the motion was that in his view the country already had what the Alliance was calling for in the form of CPIC. It was basically the same argument as the solicitor general made today.

Unfortunately the solicitor general, the member for Ottawa Centre and perhaps another two or three individuals in the country are the only people who believe that CPIC is the equivalent of a national sex offender registry.

Whether one is for or against a national sex offender registry, it is absolutely clear that CPIC is not a national sex offender registry in the sense that there is no requirement whatsoever for sex offenders to register when they move from one part of the country to another or, for that matter, move within a particular province.

The whole idea of a national sex offender registry is that there would be some obligation placed on sex offenders after they have been released from prison to let the communities they live in know that they are there. CPIC does not do this. All CPIC does is record the last known address of a particular sex offender.

● (1135)

It is quite disingenuous for the solicitor general to suggest that what they have now in any way approaches what parliament itself approved. I am referring to the motion that was approved, not what the Liberals might have had in their own minds but what parliament approved on March 13, what this motion is calling for, what the provinces are calling for, what the Canadian Police Association is calling for and what a great many other people associated with or concerned about the problem of repeat sex offenders are concerned with. It is only the government that believes CPIC somehow meets the test of what people think is required in this case.

I am reiterating our support for the idea of a national sex offender registry. However I am concerned about the motion because if we look at it, as is often the case, the Alliance is its own worst enemy. Just when its members have a good idea they like to throw a monkey wrench into it and come up with some goofy idea to wreck a good motion. What did they put in the final clause of their motion today? It reads:

That when a Private Member, in proposing a motion for the first reading of a bill, states that the bill is in response to the recommendations contained in a report pursuant to this Order, the second reading and subsequent stages of the bill shall be considered under Private Members' Business and the bill shall be placed immediately in the order of precedence for Private Members' Business as a votable item.

Supply

This reflects two things. It reflects the ongoing obsession of Alliance members with private members' business and trying to get everything votable. It also establishes a completely inadequate process in that a private member in proposing a motion for the first reading of a bill states that the bill is in response to recommendations. We do not have to prove. There is no process. Nobody else has to agree. We just state it and that is it. It automatically goes on to the order of precedence for private members' business and it automatically becomes votable.

Even the hon. member for Medicine Hat would see that there is something wrong with this proposal. If Alliance members were serious about the House reaffirming its support for a national sex offender registry, although the government has already indicated that this time around it would not be duplicitous and would actually vote against the Alliance motion, they would take this out of their motion. They have the opportunity to do that between now and the end of the day.

I certainly cannot vote for this procedural poison pill in the middle of an otherwise acceptable motion or certainly an otherwise acceptable idea that we supported in the past. If it is suggested, for instance, that somehow the bill would have to be found to be in accordance with the committee's recommendations by the Speaker, by an all party committee or by someone other than simply the member who rises, perhaps there might be a way of dealing with it.

However to have it that any particular member can simply affirm without any burden of proof and without any associated process that the bill is in response to recommendations contained in the report pursuant to this order, et cetera, I think is woefully procedurally inaccurate and makes it very difficult for us to support the motion.

Our non-support for the motion as it stands should not be construed in any way as a weakening of our support for the idea of a national sex offender registry or a weakening of our criticisms of the solicitor general for not levelling with the House on March 13, 2001, when if we read between the lines and listened to the parliamentary code we know darned well that he had no such intention.

The Deputy Speaker: Order, please. I would ask the member with the cellphone to remove it from the Chamber. It is contrary to our rules. I caution members that our rules are very clear when it comes to cellphones. They are not appropriate in our Chamber.

• (1140)

Mr. Bill Blaikie: Mr. Speaker, I wonder if you could make that clearer than it is to a lot of members who I see wandering around the Chamber with cellphones.

Yesterday while we were waiting to vote, people were talking on cell phones in the Chamber. Cell phones are proliferating. Some day there will be a thing called cellphone rage here and it is not going to be pretty.

We would be much better debating a bill today that would respond to the growing evidence that the use of cellphones, not in parliament but while driving is a danger to the public.

For the record, I have a private member's bill that calls on the government to act on this matter. Hopefully some day I will win the draw, we will get that item votable and have it come before the House.

Mr. Rick Borotsik: They should all be votable, should they not?

Mr. Bill Blaikie: Mr. Speaker, I am prepared to live by the process. I know some people think that all private members' business should be votable but that would require that bills far inferior to mine would also come up for a vote and I do not think that would be recommended.

In any case, we continue to support the idea of a national sex offender registry. However we find that the procedural innovation, to put it politely, in the Alliance motion makes it difficult for us to support it as it stands.

We call on the government to finally admit, although having listened to the solicitor general it does not sound like it is imminent, that CPIC is not a national sex offender registry. It bears no resemblance to it in the sense that the key element of what is being called for when people call for a national sex offender registry is that people have to register.

Seeing that people do not register with CPIC makes it not a registry in any sense of the word. It might make it a record or a detailed list or all kinds of things, but it is not a registry. It is completely intellectually dishonest and politically misleading for the solicitor general to continue to insist that it is so.

• (1145)

Mr. Rick Borotsik (Brandon—Souris, PC/DR): Mr. Speaker, I have a lot of respect for the NDP member. He recognized in his dissertation that the issue is really the national sex offender registry. I appreciate that it has been muddied a bit with respect to the process of private members' business.

I believe very strongly that all private members' business should be votable. Perhaps the member for Winnipeg—Transcona does not believe that. Could he not see it within himself to support the motion before us focusing specifically on the greater good of the national sex offender registry as opposed to having the waters muddied with respect to private members' business?

I believe, as does almost every member in the House, that the issue is of paramount importance. We should be putting the government on record that a registry is something that is for the better good of all Canadian citizens. Can he not see it within his own ability to support the motion as opposed to simply trying to muddy the waters with private members' business?

Mr. Bill Blaikie: Mr. Speaker, I did not muddy the waters with private members' business. The Alliance muddied the waters by putting that particular clause in its motion.

I take the hon. member's point. If there were a genuine moral dilemma and our vote today were going to make the difference between having a national sex offender registry and not, then one would have to consider that. However, we know already that the government is not supporting the motion. The hon. member and the country know that we support the notion of a national sex offender registry. I have said it over and over again today in the House. I said it back on March 13.

Supply

It is legitimate for us to point out what we find unacceptable, not just in a kind of collateral way but in an absolute way. We find it procedurally unacceptable that somebody can simply stand in the House and state without any recourse to proof or due process that something corresponds to a committee report. That is procedurally unacceptable. I think it is grounds enough in this context for us to not support the motion at this time.

Mr. Peter MacKay (Pictou—Antigonish—Guysborough, PC/DR): Mr. Speaker, I want to give my colleague from Winnipeg—Transcona, a fellow House leader, an opportunity to expand a little on what I think is the crux of the issue. That is the inability of the current CPIC system to provide for penalties when an individual who is convicted of an offence relating to sexual violence, particularly sexual violence directed at children, does not register.

Under the current system we are relying upon the good graces and the efficiency of court officials, the police, judges and prosecutors to ensure that the information is entered into a central computer bank called CPIC. We also know that the CPIC system contains all criminal convictions. It contains parole conditions. It contains the probation orders that are attached to sentences that are handed out.

What is envisioned by the motion, by the provinces and by the police is a stand-alone registry system. Sex offenders would be required to register their changes of address and their conditions of probation. That stand-alone information is what would comprise the preventive nature of the system. We know that stand-alone systems can exist because we have the cumbersome, costly, ineffective, unenforceable long gun registry.

This stand-alone system in my estimation would cost far less and would actually work. It would actually provide police with that type of information. The member is right to key in on that particular area of the motion.

The member is also right to suggest that there was an element of hypocrisy when we last had this issue before us. It begs the question, if a tree fell in the Chamber, would the Liberals hear it?

Mr. Bill Blaikie: Mr. Speaker, I will try to get my head around that last statement. The hon. member for Pictou—Antigonish—Guysborough raises a good point.

As he was working on his question, I wrote down stand-alone because that is what we want. We want a stand-alone national sex offender registry. We want the onus not just to be on the court system and the police, et cetera, but to be on the sex offenders themselves to let people know where they are. I am not saying that their pictures could be put on posters around the community or anything like that. But the proper authorities would know that they are in the community and could exercise due diligence with respect to their presence in terms of notifying school boards, teachers or whomever if that is what seems to be appropriate.

What we are looking for is a system which puts some onus on the offenders themselves. That is not what CPIC does. The government is mistaken in constantly maintaining that somehow it does this. It is misleading in the clearest sense of the word.

Mr. Peter MacKay (Pictou—Antigonish—Guysborough, PC/DR): Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to once again participate in the debate surrounding the implementation of a national sex offender

registry. This is an incredibly sound idea. The concept has been in public discussion for some time and is very much the purpose of the motion.

Ironically the motion has already been before the House. As has been stated, members unanimously supported it, yet here we are again with the same motion because of the disingenuous efforts of the government to support it. What took place was lip service, to use the vernacular, saying that we supported it yet we did nothing.

There is a record of occurrences on other subject matters where that has been the case. I personally brought in a motion pertaining to workplace safety. That motion stemmed from the terrible disaster at the Westray mine in Plymouth, Nova Scotia. Once again it was debated. It went through the entire process of private members' business. The motion was debated and was unanimously supported. It went to committee where we heard from witnesses and it was supported there. Nothing has happened, nothing.

Yet the government, through the solicitor general and other speakers, says it supports it because it already has happened. That simply is false. It has not happened. A separate stand-alone system is what is required. That is how members understand the motion to read.

It truly is deliberate and wilful blindness on the part of the solicitor general and other speakers on the Liberal side to stand and say they support it only because it already exists. It does not exist. That is the fact. Police officers, provincial attorneys general and other people working in the system will verify that the current CPIC system does not allow for a mandatory registry of information pertaining to sex offenders. That is what is needed. That is what is necessary and imperative to protect children in particular.

Mr. Speaker, I will be sharing my time with my colleague and seatmate from Prince George—Peace River.

I personally moved a motion very similar to the motion before the House. Therefore I would be following in the Liberal tradition of hypocrisy and duplicity if I did not support the motion.

The motion before the House is one which the provinces certainly support. Provincial attorneys general have repeatedly called upon the government to enact a national sex offender registry. The Canadian Police Association, the victims' resource centre and citizens generally are looking to the government to show some leadership, to show some political will if that is what it takes, and bring this system about.

That is what happened with the firearms registry. I do not want to mix messages or continually bring this into the debate, but in the past five or six years the government has spent hundreds of millions of dollars trying to register long guns in Canada based upon voluntary participation. It is voluntary only insofar as the coming year and then it will be upon pain of criminal conviction.

The government is prepared to spend hundreds of millions of dollars of taxpayers' money, which it has done before. There are ample examples of where it has done this. The cancellation of the EH-101 helicopter program is another example of hundreds of millions of dollars of taxpayers' money being spent. The Pearson airport contract cancellation cost hundreds of millions of dollars.

We are talking about setting up a system for far less. That system would impact on crime. It would actually protect and prevent victims under that type of criminal activity.

The CPIC system which is in place now is very good. It has been upgraded. It was near a state of collapse a few years ago because of Liberal neglect and cutbacks in the law enforcement area.

● (1150)

Presently, convicted offenders may be released into a community and change their residence or their appearance; the entire population is aware that sex offenders prey upon those least able to defend themselves. They do so by deceit, by disguise and very much by subterfuge. Those types of nefarious activities are done intentionally, to go undetected.

There is no faith that a sex offender registry will ever work unless there is some necessity that the offender comply upon pain of having conditions breached and going back to court. Bringing back some accountability is what is required. That does not exist under the current system. As I stated before in questions and comments, it is relying upon court records, probation officers, police and those who work in the system to enter that data.

Coupled with all the other information that is found on the Canadian Police Information Centre, it is impossible to sort it out in such a way that communities, police and those in the law enforcement community can access it in such a way that it can be used for prevention.

We know that recidivism is extremely high with sex offenders. In the event of reoccurrence, such as a heinous act of abduction or sexual assault, valuable time is lost in trying to identify the suspect who is oftentimes not known to local police or to the community because of the issue of mobility which is so prevalent.

A national sex offender registry would provide police with an enhanced ability to protect society and carry out this absolutely critical task of enforcing a safe and orderly society. It would give police better access to information about the specific whereabouts of offenders and about all convictions of a sexual nature that have been registered with the courts.

Sadly not all offences make it into the CPIC system, and I experienced this myself as a crown attorney. When the offence has occurred in British Columbia, there may be a delay in entering the information in the system if the individual is before the courts in Nova Scotia or Newfoundland.

The full picture is not before the courts. If a person has a previous offence and has shown a previous proclivity toward sexual aggression, that necessary information may not be available. That critical missing piece of the puzzle may result in an entirely different outcome at trial or perhaps more important at the sentencing stage if a conviction is returned.

A national system would allow the police much greater access to information and a much greater ability to protect. It is simply a good idea that would work. It requires investment of resources. Again, we have seen the government invest in all sorts of much less important areas of public expenditure.

Supply

The United States has state registries which are currently up and operating. The province of Ontario, as alluded to by others, is in the process of enforcing this type of system.

That technology is now available. It should be a priority. It should be a system that we are prepared to use. We have had upgrades to CPIC that include flagging pardoned records of sex offenders. We have a system that will hopefully monitor those who are on probation and who are on conditions of parole. Yet a national sex offender registry set up in a comprehensive national computer system and made available to police is an absolute necessity if we are to improve the way in which we deliver services now and monitor those in the community who have already been convicted of a sexual offence.

It could also be tailored to replace and basically adopt the computer infrastructure for the long gun registry which has been a complete waste of money.

Ontario has offered to try to apply its system to the current federal system in hopes of encouraging the federal government to adopt this.

There are two questions; one is of process. The government has tried to simply by a wink and a nod put this issue to one side by saying it has already done it. It has not done it. It comes back to the main issue. Why would the government not be prepared to support and act on the recommendation in this motion?

● (1155)

I want to conclude my remarks by saying that we have an opportunity here to also restore a bit of faith, if the government were to actually support the system and act on it. We must treat these occasions with the greatest of seriousness. Bringing in a national sex offender registry would be good in and of itself.

Before turning over the floor to my very able seatmate and colleague, I would like to move an amendment to the Alliance supply day motion, seconded by my colleague from Prince George Peace River. The amendment would essentially add to the wording in the first paragraph after the word "a" the following: "separate and stand-alone" sex offender registry.

I realize under the new rules there has to be agreement for this amendment to be inserted. I would suggest, by virtue of the comments we have heard from the Alliance members today, that they would not object to the insertion of the words separate and stand-alone, categorizing this from what the government has tried to lead people to believe; that we already have a system under CPIC that qualifies as a national sex offender registry.

Supply

• (1200)

The Deputy Speaker: I would hope and believe the hon. member for Pictou—Antigonish—Guysborough would be somewhat sympathetic to the Chair's dilemma in terms of consent from the mover of the supply motion, being the member for Langley—Abbotsford. If he indicates to the Chair that in fact he has his consent, it would be helpful. Otherwise, if the amendment is consistent with the text received earlier, I am prepared to say that the amendment appears in order. Procedurally, we would need the consent of the mover of the original motion, the hon. member for Langley—Abbotsford.

I do not know whether the hon. member for Pictou—Antigonish—Guysborough has anything to add.

Mr. Peter MacKay: Mr. Speaker, I would only add that we have made efforts to contact the mover of the motion. I of course had to remain here in the Chamber so as not to miss my spot in the rotation. Perhaps we could have some indication from a member of the Alliance who is in the Chamber if that consent might be forthcoming.

The Deputy Speaker: Again, notwithstanding the goodwill that might possibly exist from other colleagues of the official opposition, the Chair is still held to the procedural and correct way to do this. The only way the Chair can do it is with the consent of the mover, being the hon. member for Langley—Abbotsford.

I might suggest to the hon. member for Pictou—Antigonish—Guysborough that the Chair will hold the amendment in abeyance. At any time today during the debate and prior to the question being moved at a later hour, he or a colleague might come back to the House and seek the floor by way of a point of order. Then we can proceed with the matter.

We will now proceed to questions and comments for the hon. member.

Mr. Loyola Hearn (St. John's West, PC/DR): Mr. Speaker, I listened with interest to my colleague's remarks. He talked about the fact that this was not new, that it had been here before and that it was an issue that seemingly everyone supported.

Along those lines, I would like him to answer his own question, which is why the government has not moved on this. Does it not care? Are the ministers in charge are so incompetent that they cannot put the necessary piece of legislation together? Are they perhaps afraid of turning off some of the provinces? I think everyone in the country would like to see this issued settled and settled quickly. I would appreciate his comments.

Mr. Peter MacKay: Madam Speaker, I suggest that it is probably a combination of a number of factors that might be characterized as arrogance and incompetence. I certainly hope it is not an intentional move on the part of the government to avoid bringing in this system. Even the blackest heart of any individual would be quick to acknowledge that the long term implications of being abused, sexually or otherwise, as a child have such incredibly horrible consequences and lifelong effects on an individual.

More directly to the member from St. John's, in my opinion the government has made a habit of tending to denigrate and put to one side motions that are brought forward on the part of the opposition. This is done for the most partisan and small reasons that I can

imagine. This is done to garner as much credit to itself and to try to belittle and demean the opposition.

I suggest that the motion was put forward in its original form with the best intent; that is to simply encourage and call upon the government to bring in a system that would prevent these horrific crimes. It actually defies the imagination why the government would not support this motion. It supported it the first time. Surely the problem of sexual child abuse has not been eradicated in the country between the last time it was before us and today's date.

I have heard nothing thus far from the solicitor general or any member of the government that would possibly justify or give any credence to their failure to support this motion today. Yet that I am afraid is the sad spectacle that we will be treated to later in the day when the government stands up and votes against the implementation of a national sex offender registry that would help protect children in the country today.

• (1205)

Mr. Vic Toews (Provencher, Canadian Alliance): Madam Speaker, I believe the member is familiar with the statements of RCMP Commissioner Zaccardelli on May 9, 2001. He said that there were elements of information on CPIC of a sex offender registry and that the pieces of the information on CPIC were rudimentary.

We have heard the solicitor general say in the House that we have a sex offender registry. Yet we have the contradictory statements from the commissioner simply saying that there are elements of it, and they are rudimentary.

I have not heard the commissioner change his mind in a committee hearing or otherwise. Maybe the member has heard whether the RCMP commissioner has changed his mind about this.

Mr. Peter MacKay: Madam Speaker, I know my colleague is intimately familiar with the workings of the justice system.

In short order, I have heard nothing from the commissioner who similarly has spent his life's work enforcing the law. He is an individual who surely has a greater knowledge of the current CPIC system than, I dare say, the solicitor general. As he has stated, the current system has elements of providing information. It records convictions. It does not allow for a system that records changes of address, changes of appearance, known associates, known proclivities or tendencies toward violence or sexual violence.

The stand-alone elements of a sex offender system are what need to be highlighted in this debate and what have to be presented to the government. The half-truths, veiled allusions and the self-congratulatory horn blowing type of approach that the solicitor general took here today does nothing to bring about a national sex offender registry.

The contradiction is there. The commissioner of the RCMP is in a far better position to assess the current system.

Mr. Jay Hill (Prince George—Peace River, PC/DR): Madam Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague from Pictou—Antigonish—Guysborough for splitting his time with me and giving me an opportunity to speak to the opposition motion.

Supply

One thing that should be of concern not only to parliamentarians but obviously to Canadians from coast to coast is why we are having this debate again at all. In preparing my remarks today I took a look at a speech that I gave in the House about a year ago on a very similar motion. I began that day by stating:

I wish I could say that it is a pleasure for me to participate in a debate this afternoon calling for the establishment of a national sex offender registry but to be honest it is not.

If I was frustrated then on behalf of my constituents, the House can imagine how frustrated I am today. I could read this entire speech that I gave a year ago verbatim and nothing has changed except that another year has gone by, sadly with more victims out in the real world.

The relevant part of the motion put forward by the Canadian Alliance states:

That, since the government has failed to give effect to the motion adopted by this House on March 13, 2001, calling for the establishment of a sex offender registry by January 30, 2002, the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights be instructed to prepare and bring in a bill reflecting the spirit and intent of that motion;—

This is an important motion for all Canadians. One of the interesting things about the motion is that it would instruct the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights to do what it should be doing all along in this parliament, that is, non-partisan work for the betterment of society. This is quite a concept: that it could be seized by a similar motion of a year ago, which was unanimously supported by the Chamber, and do that worthwhile work.

We have heard my colleague from Pictou—Antigonish—Guysborough put forward a proposed amendment. We are waiting to hear back from the Canadian Alliance on that. Why is that amendment so critical? In a question posed to my colleague by the member for Provencher, the reply stated that CPIC does not do the job. There must be a recognition by members from all parties, in a non-partisan way, that CPIC does not do the job for the variety of reasons that my colleague laid out.

If we were to pass this motion which instructs the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights to undertake the drafting of a bill, the instructions to the committee should be to come up with something that is separate and stand alone. That way the Liberal government could not simply, with the sleight of hand that it has been using for the last few years, particularly in the last year, fiddle with CPIC and hope that it would be able to have a national sex offender registry that would somehow do the job.

Yesterday we heard from the government on Bill C-7. There was a Senate amendment which sent Bill C-7, the new youth justice bill, back to this Chamber. The government, in its infinite wisdom, decided to bring in time allocation. The argument it used was that it had heard enough about the need to reform the Young Offenders Act, there were enough studies done, and it had enough consensus across the nation from political parties that something had to happen. Even though the provinces and most opposition parties, for a variety of reasons, believe that it was a deeply flawed bill, the government brought in time allocation and rammed it through the House in its flawed state.

● (1210)

This is indicative of what the government does time and time again. The next day we are debating the need for a national sex offender registry. Where is the same concern by the government? We have another wasted year with nothing happening despite a motion passed unanimously a year ago.

A number of colleagues in the House have drawn a comparison, as we did a year ago, between the supposed need for a national firearms registry and the real need for a national sex offender registry. There is quite a difference and a number of my colleagues have laid out the government's misplaced priorities when it comes to the safety of the most vulnerable members of our society.

The government thinks that the priority of Canadians is to register the hunting rifles and bird guns of law abiding citizens and somehow that will make our society a safer place, in deference to bringing forward what all parliamentarians and the vast majority of Canadians want: a national sex offender registry. These are misplaced priorities. A number of colleagues have talked about the horrendous cost to set up this national firearms registry, and for what?

I would like to bring to light and read from a couple of newspaper articles from northern British Columbia. I did a search, going back to last year when we debated the last motion, to see what was said in northern B.C. from where I am proud to be.

The day after the motion passed in this Chamber, an article on March 14, 2001, in the Prince Rupert *Daily News* stated:

Federal Liberals supported a Canadian Alliance motion Tuesday to create a sex offender registry but say they'll expand an existing police database rather than create a costly new system. The vote to create a registry to keep track of released convicts was unanimous, at 255-0. The solicitor general explained that Liberals supported the motion because the existing Canadian Police Information Centre (CPIC) fits the bill.

It received some widespread support and was reported all over the country, even in northern British Columbia. It was seen as a positive step forward because there was unanimous support for the motion.

Two days after we passed the motion, the following article appeared on March 15, 2001, in the Prince George *Citizen*, a newspaper in my riding of Prince George—Peace River:

The family of a 13 year old Prince George girl who was molested by her employer said a newly approved national sex offender registry could prevent sexual assaults.

A registry that requires convicted offenders to report their whereabouts to police and other authorities might have prevented the offence last January, said the girl's stepfather. "These pedophiles and molesters need to be kept track of", said the man, whose name can't be disclosed in order to protect the victim's identity.

Peter Paul Joseph, 46, was convicted this month of sexually assaulting his children's babysitter and was handed a 15 month conditional sentence.

"Had the registry been in place before the offence, police would have been able to keep a close eye on Joseph, who had a prior conviction for sexual assault in 1996", the victim's stepfather said.

He said he wants the law to go further, requiring authorities to alert the public about convicted sex offenders living in a particular area. The Liberal government voted this week to support the Canadian Alliance's motion for a national registry.

It goes on to talk about the local RCMP support for that motion.

The point that I am making is that this is a motion, an issue, with widespread support outside of this Chamber. There was unanimous support in the Chamber and yet the government is still dragging its heels in bringing forward an actual implementation.

Supply

●(1215)

I cannot speak loudly enough or long enough of my support for the motion on behalf of the most vulnerable citizens of Prince George—Peace River. We must do something to bring this forward. The women and children who are the most vulnerable in our society must be protected. Now is the time to do it. I urge members from all parties to support the motion.

Mr. Peter MacKay: Madam Speaker, I rise on a point of order. As the Chair would know, I tabled an amendment that would add the words separate and stand-alone. I believe the amendment would be found in order but under the new standing orders it is requisite that the mover of the motion indicate his or her agreement.

Mr. Randy White: Madam Speaker, I agree that under Standing Order 85 that is a requisite. We believe that we should have a separate and stand-alone system. We concur with the amendment.

Mr. Peter MacKay (Pictou—Antigonish—Guysborough, PC/DR) moved:

That the motion be amended by inserting, after the first occurrence of the word “a”, the following:

“separate and stand alone”

●(1220)

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Bakopanos): The amendment is in order.

Mr. Peter MacKay: Madam Speaker, I commend my friend and colleague for his remarks and the work that he has done in this area, and all members of the House who have supported and spoken very passionately on the issue. What could possibly be more fundamental than protecting children?

I know there are members of the House, including my colleague from Surrey North, who have, within their own family circle, been victims of horrible crimes that have robbed families of their loved ones. In instances involving sexual offences, the long term implications and effects on a child are immeasurable in their harm.

It comes down to the issue that my friend honed in on, and that is one of priorities. What could be of greater priority than to bring about a system such as this? He alluded to the nonsensical and completely unjustified amount of money that has been put into registering shotguns and focusing in on rural Canada more than any other part of this country, telling individuals that they can no longer keep a long gun that might have been a family heirloom or a shotgun that is used for pest control or hunting, a legitimate exercise that Canadians have partaken in for over a century.

The Liberal government's priority is to register long guns that are not the weapon of choice rather than to register sex offenders who are out there wreaking havoc in young people's lives. Is there any choice, in terms of priorities, as to where the money and the effort should be put? Canadians deserve better than that. Would my hon. colleague care to elaborate on that point?

Mr. Jay Hill: Madam Speaker, I do not think so: There is no greater need out there than the need to protect those who cannot protect themselves, the most vulnerable members of our society.

I was just handed an excerpt from today's Prince George *Citizen*. The headline reads “Girls Given Coins Before Assault”. Two very young girls were kidnapped, taken to a gravel pit and sexually assaulted. It states:

Benjamin Corey Hart, 21, faces two counts of sexual assault and two counts of kidnapping in connection with the Jan. 4, 2001 attacks. Following the assaults, the seven-year-old girl pointed out to police where the attacks occurred. Both girls told investigators where they believed they had tossed the coins they were given. On the morning of the assaults, the girls, who lived across the street from each other, had been tobogganing outside their homes, when a man drove by a number of times, asking about an egg or chicken farm in the area, the Crown alleged. The man then pushed the girls into the vehicle and drove to a gravel pit on Groveburn Road, about 10 kilometres away, where he sexually assaulted them before returning them to their neighbourhood.

When Benjamin Hart is released, as he undoubtedly will be sometime, will he be in a national sex offender registry to protect other small girls across this nation? Will we protect them or will it happen again and again?

Mr. Roy Cullen (Etobicoke North, Lib.): Madam Speaker, the last time we had this debate in the House I went back to my riding of Etobicoke North and spoke with police officials at division 23, the main police office in my riding. It was during the last election campaign. The police in my riding are familiar with this type of problem because they had the Peter Whitmore case.

Because the issue was being debated in the House I asked the police at division 23 how bad CPIC was in terms of a sex offender registry and what kind of priority they would attach to it. They told me they would rather see modifications to CPIC than some new grandiose scheme. They said it was not the biggest priority facing them. They said offenders were being registered on CPIC and it was working quite adequately.

We have been hearing comments across the floor that this should be a top drawer issue. Opposition members say the system should be scrubbed and a new system built. They say this is a consensus among police authorities and provinces. I am puzzled by that. In my riding we have had a lot of crime and murders in the last year, yet this is not a priority. Where are the members hearing this?

●(1225)

Mr. Jay Hill: Madam Speaker, with all due respect, the hon. member is spreading misconceptions about the position of the opposition parties. No one is saying to scrap the present CPIC system. I have not heard that once.

The hon. member has the audacity to stand in this place, refer to a conversation he may or may not have had with one police officer, and cite it as reason to somehow fix CPIC so it can do the job. He ended his intervention by asking where we are getting our support. How about the 30,000 front line members of the Canadian Police Association who support a national sex offender registry? They more than anyone realize the problems inherent in the CPIC system.

Mr. Vic Toews (Provencher, Canadian Alliance): Madam Speaker, I will be splitting my time with the hon. member for Surrey North.

Supply

The hon. member for Winnipeg—Transcona questioned the procedural acceptability of the motion with respect to the mechanism to carry the bill through the House. The procedure is almost an exact rewrite of Standing Order 68(4). It had to be repeated in the Alliance motion because Standing Order 68(4) establishes a mechanism for government and private members' motions. Since we are dealing with a supply motion the procedure had to be included in our motion. That is why it is procedurally acceptable. It is the same procedure used last spring in adopting the impaired driving bills. In any event it is a technical issue.

One of the most critical issues facing parliamentarians today is that our children continue to be at risk of sexual exploitation by adult predators. It has become increasingly clear that the government can no longer afford to turn a blind eye to the atrocities committed every day in Canada against innocent young victims.

We have no way of preventing all these crimes. However we must do everything in our power to stop those who would prey on children and to penalize them if they commit these crimes. It is our duty as parliamentarians and members of the chief law-making body in Canada to do everything we can to root these offenders out of our communities and ensure they are never given a second chance to abuse a child. We cannot do everything but we can do something. Enacting a national sex offender registry is one thing that is entirely within our power.

As members know, last March the Canadian Alliance took a stand on the issue in the House of Commons. We asked members to vote in favour of implementing a national sex offender registry. Everyone including government members voted for our motion. At the time everyone agreed it was necessary to protect children from pedophiles, yet absolutely nothing has been done to protect our children from people who believe they are justified in ruining young lives.

Although everyone in the House and elsewhere knows it is not accurate, we have heard the solicitor general repeating the mantra that Canada already has a sex offender registry. He says it can be found within the Canadian Police Information Centre or CPIC. This is erroneous information. However he will no doubt continue repeating the mantra, as will other members of the Liberal Party, in an attempt to assure Canadians something is being done. I think he believes if it is repeated enough Canadians will start to believe him.

The Liberal government refuses to incorporate the changes we have asked for because they might be too difficult or expensive to administer. I do not understand how the minister and members of the government can continue to ignore the compelling and alarming evidence of the immediate need to implement the changes.

Data indicate that a rapid response during an investigation of child abduction for sexual purposes is absolutely critical. Studies indicate that of the victims who are murdered, 44% are dead within an hour of the abduction, 74% are dead within three hours, and 91% are dead within 24 hours. There is a compelling need to have information and access it quickly. The national sex offender registry would give police authorities that information.

● (1230)

The hon. member indicated CPIC already has this information. It does not. There is no requirement for sex offenders to register when they change address. If sex offenders have completed a period of incarceration and any probation or parole that might follow it, there is no legal onus on them to register the change so police authorities know where they might be.

A quick, complete and searchable sex offender registry such as we are proposing would assist police by identifying all registered sex offenders living in a geographic area, something the current CPIC does not do. In excess of 75% of the time an offender lives within a two kilometre radius of where the incident occurs.

As I have said many times, the registry we are proposing could incorporate elements of the CPIC system. Why the system has not been updated after so much time is totally mystifying.

Not only have the provinces demanded a national registry from the government, out of desperation some provincial governments have acted. The Ontario government should be commended for proceeding where the federal government has failed to act.

Tired of waiting for a federal government that says all the right things but does not do the right things, the Ontario government has implemented its own provincial registry through Christopher's law, legislation it named after a young victim who was brutally raped and murdered by a convicted pedophile on federal statutory release. The provincial government has had to clean up the mess because the federal government will not act in a responsible fashion to enact the appropriate laws.

In 1993, following the inquest into the death of 11 year old Christopher Stephenson, the coroner's jury recommended the federal government create a national registry for convicted, dangerous, high risk sexual offenders and require each such offender to register with police in the jurisdiction where they reside or will reside. That was almost a decade ago. Because nothing was done by the federal government with respect to the coroner's recommendation, the government of Ontario had to act.

It is not only members of provincial governments who support the registry. Along with provincial premiers, justice ministers and solicitors general, the RCMP commissioner has said we need it.

The Liberal member opposite told the hon. member from Prince George he had spoken to a police officer who thought everything was all right. Last March the Canadian Police Association, which consists of 30,000 police officers from across Canada, issued a press release supporting our initiative for a national sex offender registry. The member may have had a conversation with one police officer but 30,000 officers in the CPA said they supported a national sex offender registry.

In a 2001 policy resolution paper the Canadian Police Association clearly stated:

Despite persistent government claims to the contrary, the Canadian Police Information Centre (CPIC) does not provide police agencies with adequate information and notification concerning the release or arrival of sex offenders into their communities.

Supply

Noting that a federal-provincial-territorial working group reported on the issue in 1998, the CPA recommended the report be followed.

• (1235)

The commissioner of the RCMP has said that we have elements of a sex offender registry but that we do not have an effective sex offender registry. He stated in committee that we need legislation, money and manpower or personnel to do it.

It can be done. The Americans have done it under the umbrella of federal legislation. I believe 46 states have now adopted it. The minister's excuses are wearing thin. The government's excuses are wearing thin. I urge members to support the motion.

Mr. Chuck Cadman (Surrey North, Canadian Alliance): Madam Speaker, I am pleased to rise today to speak to my party's supply motion.

The main thrust of the motion reads:

That, since the government has failed to give effect to the motion adopted by this House on March 13, 2001, calling for the establishment of a sex offender registry by January 30, 2002, the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights be instructed to prepare and bring in a bill reflecting the spirit and intent of that motion;

That the Committee shall make its report to the House no later than June 1, 2002;

It is incomprehensible to me why the Liberal government would drag its feet in this most crucial area of public safety: protection from sexual predators for all Canadians, particularly from those who prey on our children.

I wish I had a dollar, and make that a U.S. dollar, for every time the solicitor general has said that the government's number one priority is public safety. That is beginning to wear thin with Canadians.

I wish I had a dollar for every time the solicitor general has said that our current CPIC is adequate despite evidence from experts that it is not. The truth of the matter is that CPIC is just not up to the job, even with the \$2 million upgrade that the solicitor general likes to tout so much. It is clear that he puts a lot of stock in half measures when it comes to the protection of Canadians from sexual predators.

The government's own research shows that 50% of child molesters reoffend in 10 to 30 years after serving their sentence. This is not a very comforting figure considering that the CPIC system, which has been operational since 1972, only offers police four searchable criteria when looking for possible reoffenders. Those criteria are name, address, offence and age. This does not give police a whole lot to go on, especially when we consider the problems associated with keeping addresses up to date. There are no federal laws setting out requirements for offenders to provide current addresses. There is no enabling legislation.

Last fall the provincial justice ministers said that the CPIC upgrade was not up to the task. They are not alone in the call for something better. The Canadian Police Association, which represents 30,000 front line officers, said that CPIC just did not cut it.

A variety of victims' groups are calling for a more viable search tool that will include physical characteristics and photographs, one that will provide jurisdictional and radius searches. Again, CPIC, to my understanding, is just not up to this kind of task. This of course is

why it is so disturbing that the government has not implemented a national sex offender registry that will meet these requirements.

That was the intent of the motion of the Canadian Alliance back in March of last year. I think it is fair to say that the solicitor general's solution to simply add addresses to CPIC does not a sex offender registry make.

In the absence of any federal initiative, individual provinces are well on the way to creating their own sex offender registries. To them there is an obvious need to identify these potentially dangerous criminals when they move into our communities long after their sentences have been served.

Ontario has its own sex offender registry up and running. It has offered that system to the federal government as a model at no cost. Ontario's registry went into effect in April 2001 and already has 5,000 names on it. Over 90% of offenders are complying with the provincial legislation that compels them to report annually.

Other provinces are beginning to follow Ontario's lead. My home province of British Columbia has enacted legislation required to establish one there. Alberta, Saskatchewan, Prince Edward Island and Nova Scotia are all considering plans for their own registries. Unfortunately, without federal participation, the very real possibility exists for these systems to lack effectiveness if they cannot communicate with each other.

Similarly, if a sex offender moves from one province to another without a national system there is little the federal government can do to track them under the present circumstances.

The driving force behind the Ontario registry was the family of Christopher Stephenson, who was murdered by a convicted sexual offender. The enabling legislation is actually called Christopher's law. It took the death of a child to create the Ontario registry. How many more needless deaths and damaged lives do there have to be before the federal government takes action?

The primary issue here is that Canadian police agencies need a quick, complete, searchable database in order to help prevent deaths and serious sexual offences.

• (1240)

No system will be 100% effective but what we have now has holes in it that are big enough to drive a truck through.

If the federal government were to implement a national version of the Ontario system, police could search known sexual offenders when an abduction or sex related crime occurs. The search would be conducted based on seven different criteria. If the crime were committed by a previously known sexual offender, the likelihood of identifying that offender would be far greater than using the current CPIC system.

There is little doubt in my mind that Ontario's example should be followed nationally. The mission statement of the Ontario registry reads:

—to enhance public safety by providing law enforcement agencies with a modern, reliable and effective electronic tool and support services to track sex offenders in our communities and to improve the investigation of crimes of a sexual nature.

Supply

In October 1998, according to the Alberta justice minister, the former federal justice minister agreed to a national registry. During the 2000 federal election, the Liberal candidate in Surrey Central, just to the south of my riding, campaigned on the creation of a national sex offender registry with the blessing of the Prime Minister. This was obviously nothing more than typical Liberal lip service for votes in regard to a very serious problem.

I urge the government to follow the example of Ontario and put the safety of Canadians ahead of all else. I know it is difficult for the Liberals to acknowledge anything done by the Ontario government, but this is not an issue with which to play petty politics. This is about public safety so why not take this innovative system and implement it on a national basis before we lose any more innocents to sexual predators?

I urge all my colleagues to support the motion.

Mr. Randy White (Langley—Abbotsford, Canadian Alliance): Madam Speaker, I would like to ask my colleague a couple of things about the national sex offender registry. Could he shed some light on what the reluctance is across the way?

I strongly suspect the government will not implement a national sex offender registry because it is concerned about establishing legislation that would mandate sex offenders to report their whereabouts, any changes in their telephone numbers, addresses and so on. I really think the government believes this is an infringement on a sex offender's life.

Does my colleague think that is entirely possible or probable, and perhaps where he would see the rights of a sex offender versus the rights of victims and innocent people in this country?

• (1245)

Mr. Chuck Cadman: Madam Speaker, where do I see the rights of the victim as opposed to the rights of the criminals, specifically the rights of a sex offender? I think many people in the country would say that somebody who preys on children should have no rights, but of course we understand that everybody is guaranteed rights under our charter.

However, whose rights should supersede in cases like this? I would suggest that virtually all Canadians would say that the rights of the victim, the rights of the children, the rights of the victims of sexual assault should supersede any rights that a criminal has to privacy.

I do believe one of the reasons the government is reluctant to implement this is that it is concerned about infringing on the rights of these people, especially after they have completed their sentences. It certainly has popped up before in other cases.

I think there is a philosophy at work here, and I would cite one case. A 20 year old person in Victoria, British Columbia was just convicted of a very serious assault. However, we could not identify him because he had been convicted as a young offender for taking part in a brutal murder in Prince Rupert along with five other young offenders. Even though a newspaper article wanted to describe the nature of this person and that he had been previously involved in serious violent activities, it could not name him because of his previous activity as a young offender. The newspaper could not name him in a newspaper article to say that he had been involved in

a very serious violent offence and that he had been convicted again as an adult.

We are dealing with some serious issues over protecting identification. I think this is one of the problems the government is having about enacting this legislation. It does not want to go anywhere close to violating any perceived right that sex offenders may have.

Mr. Peter MacKay (Pictou—Antigonish—Guysborough, PC/DR): Madam Speaker, I want to take this issue a little further. I think we are now getting into more substance around the necessity for a national sex offender registry.

We have seen through the Department of Justice on numerous occasions what I would call charter constipation, a fear that if by some means any legislation might in some way be conceived or contrived to infringe upon an individual's rights we should try to stay away from it.

We are mandated and in fact expected to bring forward legislation that will respect individual's rights but also protect people. It becomes a matter of proportionality. There are numerous legal maxims and tests that apply when cases come before the court and there are these inevitable competing interests.

The hon. member has touched on the importance of protecting those in society who, in many instances, cannot protect themselves or are preyed upon by sexual offenders. By virtue of an individual having displayed tendencies of sexual aggression toward children and having been convicted through due process in a court of law, the hon. member is right to suggest that those rights that attach to other citizens are to some degree forfeited or the state then has a right to curtail that person's rights of movement, rights of access and rights of interaction. That is what parole conditions are about.

A person who has been convicted of murder is under parole conditions for life. Similarly, sex offenders upon release, in many cases, are given certain restrictions about where they can go, whether they can attend schoolyards or places where children are found. Therefore, it is that balance and that proportionality.

Is it not incumbent upon the government to put those rights of children ahead of others?

Mr. Chuck Cadman: Madam Speaker, I absolutely agree with my colleague from Pictou—Antigonish—Guysborough. I think the majority of Canadians would agree that we must put the rights of the victims and the rights of the potential victims, who I think are the ones we talking about here, first. If there is a charter challenge or a little bit of fear that it may be challenged, so be it. It is up to us to represent our constituents and to do the things they want us to do. If the challenges are there, let them come forth and we will deal with the challenges.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Carole-Marie Allard (Laval East, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I am quite happy to speak today to this very important issue raised by the member of the opposition. He calls for a bill to be drafted and introduced to establish a registry of sexual offenders.

Supply

There is no doubt in my mind that the opposition's objective is quite laudable. This wish to protect vulnerable people and children in Canada is obviously something that we parliamentarians in Canada all take to heart.

However, I feel the need to say today that I will be voting against this motion. I believe that it duplicates what already exists in Canada. I am part of a government that has been studying this issue for several years and that continues to examine, together with the provinces and territories, better ways in which to protect children and people who are vulnerable in our society.

In the early 1990s, our government held broad consultations across the country. We consulted with representatives from organizations responsible for the care and protection of children, children's aid societies, school boards, the Big Brothers and Big Sisters, Volunteer Canada, police forces and victims groups.

These people have not asked us to create a sex offender registry. They have asked us to help them screen people wishing to work with children and other vulnerable individuals, so as to be assured that they have no record of sexual offences.

Madam Speaker, I should point out before going on that I will be splitting my time with the hon. member for Oak Ridges.

These consultations have been effective, leading to creation of the national screening system. This was developed with the co-operation of the police forces and child welfare organizations, and is working very well. It led to the creation of the Canadian Police Information Centre.

This centre provides law enforcement agencies with access to a data bank that allows local police forces to assist organizations to search for police records.

According to the latest figures, there had been more than 700,000 search requests from volunteer organizations across Canada. We can conclude, therefore, that this is an excellent tool for protecting children and other vulnerable members of our society.

The government has done a great deal to protect vulnerable individuals and children. These steps include harsher sentences for dangerous offenders, protection orders coupled with special conditions, and more stringent child pornography legislation. The national system for screening persons in positions of trust with children is one key element in the whole government strategy.

I do not think it advisable to adopt the motion presented today by the opposition, because the creation of a national dangerous offender registry poses some real problems.

Which model would we adopt? Would we go along the lines of the registry already in place in the U.S. or Ontario, with which many find fault? What about the costs of such a registry? Are they known? What about the related staffing costs? Are we not lulling the public into a false sense of security by talking of a national dangerous offender registry when truly dangerous offenders will find a way to get around it?

● (1250)

So there are fundamental issues involved and it is important today to look at them, because of the costs, the criteria relating to offences and the concerns regarding the charter and constitutional law.

The opposition often blames us for imposing structures on the provinces. In Ottawa, we have a task force that is working with the provinces to find better solutions, to co-operate and come up with effective solutions. This working group will meet again soon, on February 13 and 14. A team of senior federal, provincial and territorial officials has already met on numerous occasions and will meet again in the coming months to improve the existing structure.

I am of course in favour of improving the Canadian Police Information Centre, rather than creating a new structure that stakeholders do not really want. There is no doubt that the government is working. I sit on the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights and I can say that this government works relentlessly to ensure that the best possible tools are available to protect Canadians in their neighbourhoods. The Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights and the Department of Justice, along with the provinces and territories, will continue their work and, on a regular basis, monitor progress.

In conclusion, I want to say once again that the government is doing its best to protect Canadians and will continue to do so. We will continue to find solutions that are innovative and that benefit all Canadians. We will continue to improve our Canadian Information Police Centre. It is a reliable data bank that has proven effective.

The provinces that want their own sex offender registries will be able to use the Canadian Information Police Centre to transmit useful information to all police forces in the country.

For these reasons, I must oppose the motion, because it is important to co-ordinate the efforts made in Canada to protect vulnerable people and children. In my opinion, the sex offender registry is a structure that we should not impose on the provinces, since they are currently not interested in it and since such a structure would interfere with existing jurisdictions.

I trust that our government will continue to work to protect vulnerable people and children in our society. Therefore, I will not support the motion.

● (1255)

[*English*]

Mr. Bryon Wilfert (Oak Ridges, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I am pleased to speak on this issue brought forth today by the hon. member for Langley—Abbotsford concerning the establishment of a national sex offender registry.

The solicitor general and the Minister of Justice continue to take steps in a number of areas, each of which contribute to public safety in a meaningful and effective way. It is clear that we want the best system possible to protect our children. That is something which all of us in the House agree upon. It is something the government is doing and will continue to do in the interest of all Canadians.

Supply

The government has built a solid foundation in an effort to prevent the victimization of children. In 1994, when the child centred organizations and groups representing victims expressed their concerns, the government responded by putting into place a national screening system to keep convicted sex abusers from working with children and other vulnerable groups. In 1995 a national flagging system was set up to help prosecutors deal more effectively with high risk offenders. The government has created a new form of long term supervision for sex offenders after they complete their normal sentence. Peace bonds allow special conditions to be imposed on high risk sex offenders even when they are not under sentence. With these measures, the government has imposed tougher controls on sex offenders and has made Canada a safer place.

The RCMP's Canadian Police Information Centre, CPIC, already provides, as we have talked about, a national registry for all criminal convictions, including sex offences. Child care agencies can seek potential employees by requiring them to obtain a CPIC check through the local police. The agency can screen out any individual found to have a criminal record. To ensure that the local agencies are making the best possible use of CPIC's process, the government has supported Volunteer Canada in providing a national education and training campaign for volunteer agencies to promote effective screening approaches.

For the most part I have talked about children as the potential victims of sex offenders, but I remind the House that children are not the only victims. Indeed, the institutionalized, the mentally challenged, the physically disabled and the elderly can be victims of those who prey upon the most vulnerable. We want the best public safety system to protect Canadians, but chief among them, the most vulnerable, are our children.

I am sure that hon. members recognize that positive actions taken by the government contribute to the safety of everyone. We continue to improve on this system because clearly no system is perfect.

Last year at the meeting of federal, provincial and territorial ministers responsible for justice, the Solicitor General of Canada announced new funding for CPIC to enhance the capacity to track sex offenders. The upgrade means that police will now have instant access to information about sex offenders under a distinct, searchable category combining address and offence. This category will be linked to other criminal history and police information already contained in CPIC and to any provincial sex offender registries.

In the spring of 1999 the solicitor general introduced legislative proposals to ensure that the records of pardoned sex offenders would be available for screening purposes. Even a successful application for a pardon is no longer a shield against a record check. This legislation came into effect on August 1, 2000. Such government initiatives are not developed in isolation or without recognizing that other jurisdictions have an interest in protecting Canadians. This legislation was founded on recommendations made by the federal, provincial and territorial working groups. It was supported by all jurisdictions as represented by federal officials and provincial and territorial ministers responsible for criminal justice. Earlier I mentioned the national screening system. In developing this system, the departments of the solicitor general, health and justice undertook extensive consultations across the country with victims, police and child serving organizations.

The intent of the current motion before the House for a national sex offender registry in large part is addressed to current practice. We already have a very credible and comprehensive national strategy. It is called CPIC and is a national registry for all convicted offenders, including sex offenders.

● (1300)

I have highlighted for the House numerous meaningful initiatives the government has undertaken. I would also point out, though, that there are two sections of the criminal code that deal with sexual offenders against children, dangerous offenders and long term offenders. Section 753 of the criminal code relates to dangerous offenders and applies to those who have committed an indictable offence involving violence that endangers life. In the criminal code it includes all offences including sexual assault, rape and intercourse with a child. If convicted, the offender can be designated a dangerous offender and the sentence will be indeterminate. In other words, there will be no end date in terms of the sentence.

Section 753.1 of the criminal code deals with long term offenders, repeat behaviours, an inability to control sexual impulses, and risks to the community, but the threshold is lower. Unlike a sentence for a dangerous offender, this sentence could be as little as two years for the offence but the judge is empowered, if satisfied, to in fact determine that this person is a risk to the public and then can designate that individual as a long term offender where appropriate. The judge can add as much as 10 years to the sentence. In other words, someone who received a 4 year sentence could receive a sentence of 14 years.

Nevertheless, given all of these comments I believe that the government is always open to suggestions that might promise positive reform. In this respect, the federal-provincial-territorial working group on high risk offenders shared its findings with provincial officials last December. There is still much that needs to be done within the context of the FPT consultations and co-operative efforts in this area and I think we all recognize that. The government continues to work with its FPT partners to examine options, including the use of CPIC as a vehicle to maintain the whereabouts of released sex offenders.

The government will never be satisfied that it has done everything possible to protect the vulnerable from sex offenders. As long as there are victims, there will be a need for constant improvement. The government is committed to that and to any suggestion in that regard. We need to keep our communities safe.

Supply

In conclusion, the national registry already exists through CPIC and the government has invested and continues to invest in improvements. Given that this is a very complex issue in regard to the nature of the exchange among federal, provincial and local police, it is imperative to get a national consensus to move forward. My understanding is that this national consensus should arrive sooner rather than later.

• (1305)

Mr. Randy White (Langley—Abbotsford, Canadian Alliance): Madam Speaker, I wonder if the member opposite could explain to me how something occurs in this national sex offender registry that he calls CPIC. Law enforcement agencies and everyone else deny that CPIC is a national sex offender registry, but let us suppose for the moment that it is.

Could the member tell me how we could make offenders report changes in this sex offender registry? For instance, if they go from one province to another or live in a certain province and change their addresses or names, which they are allowed to do, or if they are coming out of a federal or provincial prison from serving time for a sex offence and actually move somewhere else, I wonder if the member could tell us how to enforce the mandatory updating and changes unless that is legislated, like the province of Ontario has done.

Mr. Bryon Wilfert: Madam Speaker, I thank the hon. member for his question.

Even in terms of whether the issue is legislated, the fact is that anyone can provide false information. Someone may provide a false address. I agree with the member that the issue is one of discharge, how we follow up once a person has been released. Obviously that is part of the issue on which federal, provincial and territorial governments are working. Without a clear national approach, the issue the member raises could happen. Unless there is a clear national policy that all provinces and territories buy into, there would be cracks in the system.

It would seem to me that at this point the issue is one of discharge and how to improve it. I think we all agree that in terms of the tracking, even if the member's motion is taken into account, the issue is how we apply it when dealing with individuals who, for whatever reason, do not provide truthful information on the applications once they are discharged.

The issue is a critical one and I would agree with the member that this is what we need to continue to work on. That is what the consultations are trying to achieve. I would hope that the government makes it a priority to move on this as quickly as possible with its provincial counterparts. If as we have heard in the House there is concern from our provincial and territorial counterparts and from the federal government, then reaching a conclusion that is in the best interests of all Canadians in dealing with these perpetrators when they leave should not be that difficult to attain.

In that regard, I would implore the solicitor general and the Minister of Justice to move as quickly as possible with their provincial counterparts and report to the House as soon as possible on that matter.

Mr. Randy White: Madam Speaker, actually this is not happening. The province of Ontario implemented a sex offender

registry and the necessary legislation out of frustration that the federal government was not doing anything. The provinces of P.E.I., Alberta and British Columbia are following suit.

The difficulty most everybody in the country has is with the reluctance on the part of the federal government to mandate that sex offenders report. The reluctance is due to its insistence that any kind of mandate to report would be an offence to privacy. That is what the problem is here. Let us get it on the table. I would like to ask the member again, why is it that the government would not, could not, will not put in a simple piece of legislation mandating it instead of what is happening now? The Ontario police cannot depend upon the Correctional Service of Canada to demand of its prisoners who are going outside that they report. It will not even co-operate in that. The provincial police have to go inside the prison, give the notice and go back out. There is—

• (1310)

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Bakopanos): We have run out of time, so with a quick response, the hon. member for Oak Ridges.

Mr. Bryon Wilfert: Madam Speaker, there is a lot of talk in the House with regard to the Ontario sex offender registry. Unfortunately it applies to those with two years and under and it deals with provincial rather than federal offenders. Therefore it is only part of the overall issue because it deals only with provincial offenders with two years and under, not with federal offenders. That is part of the problem we are trying to solve, hopefully, by establishing a strong national registry.

Mr. Garry Breitkreuz (Yorkton—Melville, Canadian Alliance): Madam Speaker, I would like to bring a completely different perspective to the discussion on the motion the official opposition has brought forward today for a national sex offender registry.

In November we received a report from a man who moved from Manitoba to a small town in Alberta. A short time after he moved he received a call from an official in the federal Department of Justice asking him if he had reported his change of address as it was a criminal offence not to do so. The man then moved to Calgary, where once again he received a call from the justice department official who asked if he had reported his change of address.

Was this a convicted sex offender who had a federal Department of Justice official tracking him across Canada? Not at all. Was this a dangerous repeat offender who had the federal government checking up on him? Not at all. This man was a law-abiding Canadian who had just applied for, passed a test for, paid for and was issued a firearms possession and acquisition licence.

According to regulations made by the governor in council, and it is really the justice minister, in accordance with section 117(a) of the Firearms Act it is a criminal offence for a firearms owner to move without telling the government within 30 days. The maximum penalty for violating this law is two years in jail.

The problem was that the man whom the government tracked from Manitoba to a small town in Alberta and then on to Calgary did not even own a gun. He just had a licence to acquire one. One would think that after spending \$700 million on a gun registry the government might have known that from the information on this man's file.

Why is the government not so diligent about tracking the whereabouts of convicted sex offenders or dangerous repeat offenders? The actions of this overzealous Department of Justice bureaucrat prove that the government thinks it is more important to track a law-abiding citizen than it is to track convicted sex offenders. Hopefully the Privacy Commissioner of Canada will report to parliament on this horrendous breach of privacy.

Now to my key point: The Liberals have turned the justice system on its head. Instead of focusing on known criminals who are a real threat to society, they are spending hundreds of millions of dollars focusing on law-abiding citizens who, by issuing them a firearms licence, the government has declared are no threat to public safety.

As has been reported here today, the government's own research shows that 50% of child molesters reoffend 10 to 30 years after serving their sentence. Why is the government so reluctant to track the whereabouts of these individuals?

Unfortunately the privacy breaches for law-abiding citizens do not stop with mandatory reporting of addresses under threats of two years in jail. The RCMP has created a huge database in CPIC with private and personal information on 3,731,716 individuals as of November 3, 2001. The database is called the firearms interest police database. Last August the Privacy Commissioner of Canada reported that this database is full of garbage that has been loaded on those files without RCMP knowledge or consent.

Madam Speaker, I will be splitting my time with the hon. member for Souris—Moose Mountain.

On pages 28 and 29 of his report, the privacy commissioner states:

As a result, in some cases, the database contains entries on individuals who should never have been flagged as they do not meet the ineligibility criteria under section 5 of the Firearms Act. A FIP hit sometimes directs the FO to unsubstantiated and derogatory information, unproven charges or allegations, hearsay, records that are older than 5 years, incidents and charges that have been cleared or acquitted, duplicate entries as well as information about witnesses, victims of crime and various other associated subjects. People are unaware that they are being flagged in FIP as possible risks to public safety. Also, inaccurate information on FIP or information that has already been the subject of a previous investigation and cleared, is used over and over.

At this time, neither the RCMP nor DOJ has a framework or methodology in place to verify how many of the FIP records fall outside of the requirements of section 5 of the Firearms Act.

That is the end of the quotation from the privacy commissioner. We ought to take careful note of what he has said.

• (1315)

The government has no compunction about violating the privacy rights of millions of law abiding Canadians but it is concerned about the privacy rights of a few thousand convicted sex offenders. Has the government completely lost its senses? It absolutely does not make sense. I introduced a private member's motion which read:

Supply

That, in the opinion of this House, the government should enact legislation to require convicted sex offenders and those prohibited from owning firearms to report any change of address to police.

Hopefully after today the government will include this sensible provision in the new legislation implementing its national sex offender registry.

My sympathies go out to all young children who will be exposed to danger, injury and death if the government fails to act. As mentioned earlier today, it is absolutely crucial that police have the capability to track child molesters and to track them quickly.

Of children who are abducted for sexual purpose, of those victims who are murdered, 44% are dead within one hour of the abduction, 74% within three hours and 91% within 24 hours. This is an extremely important life and death discussion in which we are engaged.

A sex offender registry would assist police by identifying all the registered sex offenders living within a particular geographic area, something CPIC does not do. In excess of 75% of the time an offender lives within a two kilometre radius of where the incident occurs.

Almost a year ago on March 13, 2001, the House unanimously passed a Canadian Alliance motion which read:

That the government establish a national sex offender registry by January 30, 2002.

That deadline has come and gone and no real action has been taken. While the government tracks law abiding gun owners, convicted sex offenders roam freely. It is time for the government to keep at least one of its promises, and let that one promise be to establish a national sex offender registry.

The government just argued that the system was not perfect and implied that it was working on it. Where are its priorities? Where is it spending its money? It is being spent tracking duck hunters and not dangerous sex offenders. It is not tracking terrorists or people who are in Canada illegally. We know there are 27,000 people whose addresses are not known to the government who have been ordered deported. Nothing is being done.

For the government to argue that it is working on it is a spurious argument at best because if we look at where it is putting the resources we see that almost \$700 million has been spent trying to track firearms in the country. It refuses to do a cost benefit analysis of whether it is producing any results worthy of the hundreds of millions being spent on it.

What is the government's priority? Is it tracking sex offenders? No. A huge amount of money is being spent in an area that has little benefit. It is not registering criminals. Instead it is registering law abiding citizens. It has established a huge bureaucratic gun registry with little benefit and instead it should be establishing a registry of sex offenders.

Supply

• (1320)

Mr. Roy Cullen (Etobicoke North, Lib.): Madam Speaker, earlier I mentioned in the House that I had talked to the local police department. The member for Prince George—Bulkley Valley, and I did not raise it as a point of order, commented that I may or may not have. I would not stand in the House and say that I spoke to the division if I did not. I spoke with division 23 in Etobicoke North. In fact I spoke with the staff sergeant.

It seems part of the debate is about whether we make modifications to CPIC or whether we have to go with a grandiose scheme, reinvent and start with a totally new system at great cost.

The minister has acknowledged that there is a new category on CPIC for sex offenders. The police in division 23 told me they can get on to CPIC to find the information needed. In a perfect world it would be nice to ask for all sex offenders in Etobicoke North. That would be a perfect world, but we deal with a world where we have finite resources and we have to make choices.

The police in my area are telling me that we have bigger priorities. We have people killing people for drugs. We have other ongoing things in Etobicoke North.

Why do the opposition parties insist that we need a totally new system rather than modifying CPIC which is already there and making it work better?

Mr. Garry Breitkreuz: Madam Speaker, the hon. member did not ask me anything about the main point of my speech. That should be obvious by his question.

We are spending an inordinate amount of resources tracking law-abiding citizens and not tracking criminals. If the government were serious about that it would have fixed CPIC so that the criminals whose whereabouts we know nothing about would be the emphasis and the focus. Rather than spending hundreds of millions of dollars on something that is producing a benefit, it spends it in a useless area.

The member mentioned his own area of Etobicoke North. Ontario Provincial Police officers have told people who have come to them asking for information on how to register their guns that they want to have nothing to do with it. They do not want to be told about the problems people were having with registering guns and complying with the legislation. They do not want to have anything to do with it. It does not do them any good. Rather they emphasized that they need resources to deal with the criminal element, that they need to put more police on the street.

The government is not doing what is necessary even in the area the member just mentioned: improving the CPIC system. It is not tracking sex offenders and properly registering them.

The government has put forward a spurious argument. We need a sex offender registry. The government committed to it and now it is backtracking on it. At least it should keep one promise.

Mr. Peter MacKay (Picou—Antigonish—Guysborough, PC/DR): Madam Speaker, I agree with the hon. member's last statement. When it comes to not keeping its promises the government has set a new high or perhaps a new low. The GST and free trade are classic

examples of commitments that were made on the public record, usually in a pre-election mode, and then completely cast aside.

That is part of the Liberal tradition begun by Prime Minister Trudeau when he spoke of gasoline taxes or wage and price control. That was part of the say what one has to say to get elected tradition.

With respect to this issue it has left me with a feeling of sadness as I heard Liberal members repeatedly toe the party line and behave like the whipped puppies they are on such an important issue.

This is an issue of fundamentally protecting children from sexual predators and putting in place a system. It would not be a new complicated, elaborate system like the gun registry to which the hon. member for Etobicoke North alluded. That \$100 million, ill-fated, cumbersome, costly, impossible to enforce system is a perfect example of what the minister was talking about.

We in the opposition are trying to keep it on a factual, intellectually honest basis. We are talking about a parallel system that specifically targets sex offenders, requiring them to register their change of address and to check in periodically. We would monitor their activities so that we could warn communities and arm police with information that could be used to prevent crimes. That is what we are talking about.

All this other muddying of the waters, alluding to a separate system and repealing CPIC is nonsense. It is a complete fabrication to take the emphasis away from the government once again backing away from a promise it made and a promise it will break.

• (1325)

Mr. Garry Breitkreuz: Madam Speaker, the member makes a good point. We are talking about the weak and vulnerable in society: women and children who are most likely to be targeted by sex offenders.

The government has set up a completely separate system to register gun owners, law abiding citizens, but when it comes to criminals and sex offenders it does not do that. That is what we are asking for.

Mr. Roy Bailey (Souris—Moose Mountain, Canadian Alliance): Madam Speaker, it is obvious in this debate that we on this side of the House are extremely concerned about what our constituents have to say about the topic we are debating today.

It is almost a year since the government promised that it would bring in a national sex registry. I wonder how many sexual offences have been committed since that time because of the lack of a registry. I have two girls in my family and three granddaughters. I know very well how I would feel if they had been abused.

I have in my hand a letter from a police association within my constituency. Every detachment of the city police and mounted police agree with the letter dated a year ago which states on behalf of members of this police association that they strongly support the proposed legislation. It is interesting to note the letter also states that the Canadian Police Information Centre does not meet their needs.

I do not know why the government would continue to say it is a matter of simply registering and would defend it as something of very little cost.

In the last two months I have received many letters, mainly from ladies groups, church groups and so on, wanting me to come up with some idea of why the government has delayed the legislation. I could not for the life of me give them an answer at the spur of the moment on the phone.

I have since thought of some of the ways. First, it looks like the solicitor general is the person who is holding back the national sex offender registry and the government is holding back the funds. That is one logical conclusion. I do not know that for sure. I know it has spent, as my colleague has talked about, over half a billion dollars on another registry that has not saved anyone's life and the costs are growing. I saw in the paper that only a third of guns had been registered.

What is another possible reason aside from there being no money left? Is it that the Liberals will only implement an idea they thought of first? I hardly think that. However, if that were the case, then they should take the idea, make it theirs and bring in the registry. We could not care less. We know it is needed and that people are crying out for it.

I wonder if I could answer a phone call by saying the Liberals have an aversion to using something that actually works. We could ask the provinces that have put in their own registries and they will tell us that they work.

However the provinces that have implemented it may not be of the same political stripe. Too much time is spent on the politics of things while we are interested in the possibility and likelihood of saving people, particularly young girls, from a sexual predator.

We cannot say that a national sex registry would not make any difference, because it has made a difference not only in our provinces but around the world.

What other excuse could there be? This is a pretty good one: They actually believe in the rights of the offender more than they believe in the rights of the victim. I think that has been proven over and over again.

● (1330)

Are the Liberals spending too much time worrying that they may bring in legislation that will offend a predator or his rights and freedoms? That is a possibility. Again they are forgetting about the victims.

We should do what we think should be done. I think the solicitor general actually believes he knows better than all the police forces across the country. He thinks he knows better than those who want to protect our children. He thinks he knows better what needs to be done in this area.

We do not believe that. The people of Canada do not believe that. Why in the world have we not moved on this registry?

The hon. gentleman thinks he knows better than the victims groups. We should listen to the victims groups. The hon. minister thinks he knows better than the police associations.

Supply

We continue to get letters from the police associations asking that a bill be introduced. In my own riding people have clearly stated the same thing. The Canadian Police Information Centre does not presently meet the requirements for a sex offender registry. Are all those statements going down the drain today? Are the people across Canada not being heard? I do not know how anyone can put up an argument against the bill and this registry.

Do the solicitor general and the government think they know better than the front line officers? The front line officers could write a book about these horrific events. Does the solicitor general think he knows better than those who have been abused?

Abraham Lincoln once said in speaking about alcohol that alcohol "has many defenders" but so far nobody has come up with a defence. I would say the same thing about the motion. There are some defenders on that side of the House. They will speak and they will question but one thing I guarantee is that they cannot come up with a good defence for this motion not being passed.

Mr. Randy White (Langley—Abbotsford, Canadian Alliance): Madam Speaker, I have a whole file of letters. I am going to quote from several to ask my colleague a question.

The first one is from the solicitor general of Alberta. He wrote: "I can advise that the Alberta government is currently reviewing the feasibility of establishing a provincial high risk offender registry. Although a national registry is considered to be the most viable and useful option in the matter, the federal government has not taken the appropriate action to establish this registry. In Alberta we feel this initiative is long overdue and we must therefore establish a provincial registry".

The London Police Association wrote: "The Canadian Police Information Centre does not presently meet our requirements for a sex offender registry. We support the creation of a separate database available to police through the CPIC network".

The Mounted Police Professional Association wrote: "The CPIC system does not presently meet our requirements for a sex offender registry. We support the creation of a separate system".

I could go on and on reading from letters. The members across the way say they are working with everybody and they will fix it up. Everybody they are supposed to be working with is saying that it is no good and to get a separate registry.

What is the problem here? Everybody we know of is saying that this does not work, that we need a national sex offender registry but members on the other side are saying it is the national sex offender registry and it works. Can my colleague reconcile that?

● (1335)

Mr. Roy Bailey: Madam Speaker, it would appear that government members do not believe that bringing in legislation will be of any benefit. That is what I hear them saying. I hear them saying that a hodgepodge, throwing it in with CPIC, will be the answer.

Supply

Not one province in Canada believes that. Not one police force in Canada believes that. My only assumption is that the Liberals do not seem to understand that high risk offenders do not pay any attention to provincial boundaries. They move back and forth. It is imperative to have a national sex offender registry.

Mr. Loyola Hearn (St. John's West, PC/DR): Madam Speaker, following up on the previous question, the government continues to say that it has an adequate registry. I am beginning to wonder if it is talking about the one that is supposed to be in existence. If we look at the amount of time and money it is spending on the gun registry, is it trying to tie it into that? Certainly the present registry is not the one Canadians want. Would the member comment on that?

Mr. Roy Bailey: Madam Speaker, I do not think the government really wants to have the half a billion dollars and growing in the gun registry connected with what we are trying to do here. I can assure the hon. member that the cost of doing what we want to do with this registry would make the expense of the gun registry look like a Sunday school collection. I would do that without any hesitation of the cost of the national registry we are talking about.

The police say that they are pleased to lend their collective voices in support of a national sex offender registry. That is what they are saying across Canada.

Mrs. Brenda Chamberlain (Guelph—Wellington, Lib.): Madam Speaker, members on both sides of the House are worried about sexual offenders. There is no doubt about that.

For Alliance members to try to portray themselves as the good people who are defending the interests of people and the Liberal members as the terrible people because we do not is simply quite untrue.

The reality is we do have something in place called CPIC. When I met with police officers from Guelph, Ontario, they told me it was a good system. It needs more money and more expansion and that is happening. We on this side of the House always work to expand and make things better.

It is wrong to simply throw out a system that works and which the police back. To do that at the gain of real political points is a cheap shot.

● (1340)

Mr. Roy Bailey: Madam Speaker, the hon. member knows very well that I never in my life made a cheap shot of that nature in the House and I did not do it with this issue.

Let me quickly respond. If what we have presently is the answer, why do the police continue to say that they want a quicker response, that they want the registration to be this way or that way? The hon. member would know that in her province the police support the provincial registry. It is not something that only we are saying. It is being said across Canada.

Mr. John Maloney (Erie—Lincoln, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I welcome the opportunity to speak to the motion of the hon. member for Langley—Abbotsford on behalf of my colleague, the Minister of Justice.

We on this side of the House are unequivocal in our support for any feasible measure that will effectively protect our children, indeed all of our citizens, from sexual predators. At the same time, however,

I would urge all members to exercise caution and not jump at any measure that promises a quick fix, that claims to be a cure-all for this most pressing problem. I fear that a temptation in the specific area of sex offender registries is to leap first and look later. That appears to have happened all too often in some jurisdictions that have gone before us.

In fact this morning in the justice committee the hon. member for Prince Albert commented that often we are too quick to pass laws, to push a button that makes us feel good, but we are weak in evaluating and monitoring. Now the opposition wishes to charge forward on this issue. It seems to pick whatever process best suits its political purposes. What hypocrisy.

[*Translation*]

For example, over the last decade, the number of registries of sex offenders has jumped from a few isolated ones to registries in the 50 American states, in the United Kingdom, in Scotland, Ireland and even recently in Canada, in the provinces of Ontario and British Columbia.

[*English*]

Given the implementation of these registries, one might easily assume that these registries stop sex offenders in their tracks. With all of these registries by now, one might assume there are all kinds of studies that empirically support such claims. Imagine my surprise when I found out that not one single study has been published that empirically concludes that sex offender registries reduce reoffending rates. Imagine my surprise when I found out that in many jurisdictions quite the opposite has happened.

For example, in the majority of states in America that have implemented a sex offender registry, anyone, even those of us sitting at home in Canada, can log on to the Internet and see pictures and addresses of every known sex offender living in that state. In many cases their pictures will be available like that for the rest of their lives. Has that active publication of personal information reduced sex crimes? Apparently not.

Here in Canada where sex offender registries have yet to have any impact on available data, the incidence of violent sexual offences per capita has been steadily dropping over the past few years. This is not the case however in most U.S. jurisdictions that publish the names of sex offenders over the Internet. At the same time these states have all experienced atrocious acts of vigilantism against these offenders. While some may say "Very good, they deserve it", I and the government could never condone any such system that invited retaliation.

The question is, why would anyone pass a sex offender registry law that to date seems to have had so little positive effect? All too often these policies are drafted in haste, in a crisis situation born of desperation. All too often we have seen an isolated tragedy involving a sex offender and a child which causes an immediate legislative call to arms. In their haste, as has often been the case in this highly emotional issue, legislators fail to understand all the consequences of their emotionally drafted bills.

In almost every single case where a legislative body has passed a sex offender registry bill, the same scenario was played out: a painful and highly publicized case of kidnapping and murder of a child, followed by community outrage, calls for action and passionate speeches calling for new and better tools to combat this problem. Were the resulting registries always the best tools for the job? Was careful analysis of sex offender traits and trends used to model and shape a policy designed to reduce reoffending? Were legislators solely dedicated to finding the right policies? Or were there other factors at play, factors such as revenge, blame and politics?

How well did the resulting registries work? Did sex offenders all stop offending? The data suggests otherwise. For example, in one of the most comprehensive recidivist studies ever undertaken, a recent study by the National Center on Institutions and Alternatives looked at over 45,000 historical sex offenders in the United States and concluded that 87% of these convicted offenders do not commit another sex offence after release. This rate is substantially better than that observed for other forms of property and violent crimes. Yet sex offender registries typically target 100% of convicted offenders regardless of their determined threat or likelihood of recidivism based on a personal profile. In most cases all of these offenders are required to register for the rest of their lives.

Instead of focusing its efforts on, for example, the 13% who are likely to reoffend, police forces in the states that have sex offender registries must spend their resources on monitoring 100% of all convicted sex offenders, over 200,000 of them to date in the United States, regardless of their likelihood of reoffending. Most criminology experts argue that the registry concept is incredibly inefficient.

Many of the American registries are facing a new threat from their state and federal supreme courts where rights based challenges against lifelong mandatory registration requirements are starting to proceed through the appeals process. The news is not great. Many states, including Massachusetts, New York and New Jersey, have had their respective registries struck down in whole or in part as a result of clashes with state constitutional rights, few of which are as stringent as the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. Certainly there are lessons to be learned from these experiences.

When the United Kingdom drafted its sex offender registry and forced Ray Whiting to register for his sex offence related murder of Jason Swift, how did it happen that after his statutory release for that crime he managed to rape and murder yet another victim, young Sarah Payne? Why did the local police admit that the U.K. sex offender registry, as it existed, was of little use in monitoring the offender, or in preventing the subsequent crime, or in treating the offender, or in investigating and apprehending that offender?

Why did subsequent inquiries conclude that toughening the existing sex offender registry would have had little impact in preventing cases like the Sarah Payne tragedy? Why was it that most experts concluded that Whiting's failure to receive therapy and assistance in integrating into the community was the chief factor that caused this tragedy? Why did the U.K. government introduce in the following year a new sex offender registry law?

What then do we make of sex offender registries? Are they perfect? Certainly not. Are we intent on repeating these types of

Supply

mistakes? Hopefully not. Can we learn from the experience of others? I sincerely hope so.

The motion before us today is an example of the desire to sprint ahead without having examined all the pitfalls that may lay ahead. The implication of this motion is that the government is doing nothing while our children remain in danger. Nothing could be further from the truth.

I would like to note the solicitor general's efforts to date on this matter. The solicitor general rose in the House last March and stated emphatically that he supported the motion by the member for Langley—Abbotsford, as did all members present, because this nation already possessed one of the most technologically advanced criminal registries in the world, the Canadian Police Information Centre. We know it as CPIC. Further, he told the House that his department would begin evaluating potential improvements to CPIC in the specific areas of sex offences, citing the criticism that CPIC was not address searchable by police officers.

In a very short period of time he fulfilled that commitment when he announced on September 11 last year that a new database within the CPIC system was to be created: the sex offender category. Further, he announced that the database would be address searchable and would be up and running within a year, funded completely by the federal government.

That is not all the government has done in recent years to combat the dangers of sexual predators. In 1997 we proclaimed Bill C-55 which strengthened the dangerous offender rules in part XXIV of the criminal code and also created a new sentencing provision called long term offender.

• (1350)

As a result of these changes, prosecutors in almost every province are aggressively pursuing dangerous offender and long term offender designations. In fact, since 1997 the number of successful dangerous offender applications has doubled each year.

The 1997 legislative package also created a new category called the long term offender. It targeted individuals who were clearly a threat but who would not meet the threshold as a dangerous offender. This new designation recognized that released sex offenders who received supervision and treatment in the community experienced dramatically lower recidivist rates than offenders who were released at warrant expiry without conditions for supervision or treatment.

In addition to their custodial period, long term offenders can be sentenced to up to 10 years of community supervision and conditions following the termination of their custodial period. This innovative measure has already resulted in over 100 successful long term offender applications.

Supply

The government also recognized that there were new emerging areas of sex crimes that needed to be targeted specifically. In 1997 and later in 1999, parliament passed important measures to protect children from being drawn into the sex trade. A new offence of aggravated procuring was created, with a minimum five year sentence, to deal with those who use violence against a child and force that child into prostitution related activity. Special protections were instituted to make it easier for children to testify in court against pimps.

Bill C-15A, which is now before the House, contains new provisions that would make it an offence to lure minors over the Internet for the purpose of committing a sexual offence. However, none of these initiatives happened overnight.

While I agree with my colleagues that this is an urgent problem, cobbling together a mandatory sex offender registry without looking at all the issues, all the details and all the facts will not result in good legislation.

Instead, the solicitor general has taken a different approach. He has asked his officials to work with all the provinces and territories to fully explore the issue, to determine what is and what is not feasible in the Canadian context, to determine what works and what does not, and to find out where some jurisdictions have succeeded and where others have failed. I fully support this approach and this side of the House fully supports this approach. It is obvious to me that the provinces also support this approach. Why else would they be participating fully in the federal-provincial-territorial working group on high risk offenders currently seized with this matter?

Canadians must abide by many rules, many laws and many conventions that are uniquely Canadian. The division of powers between federal and provincial governments is quite different from that found in, for example, the United States or the conventions and laws of the unitary styled United Kingdom. We have a constitution, including a charter of rights, that is unique and, while similar, is different from the American bill of rights. Any proposed national sex offender registry can only be successful if it is designed and drafted within this unique Canadian context.

It is for those specific reasons that there are high level discussions taking place among the federal, provincial and territorial officials on what kind of registry system would be workable in the very unique Canadian context. From the issue of charter and privacy challenges, to how information could be transferred from jurisdiction to jurisdiction and from computer system to computer system, to whether non-compliance should be a criminal code offence, there are many choices and the solicitor general is looking for a consensus among our partners before proceeding further.

That approach makes sense. If we are going to have a registry, we should have one that works, that is efficient and affordable, that will recognize the impact of the charter of rights and freedoms, that is not in breach of federal or provincial privacy laws, that local police agencies will have the ability and resources to administer, one for which all provinces and territories from coast to coast to coast can agree on a consistent approach, and one that will not drive convicted sex offenders underground with changed identities and no hope of rehabilitation.

In closing, I must decline to support the motion, not because I do not wish to protect our children from sex offenders, because I do, but because I insist that my government does more than just pretend to protect our children from sex offenders. I will not support any measure that is not properly understood, not completely explored and does not receive full scrutiny at every level.

No measure within the criminal justice system exists in a vacuum, sex offender registries included. The task of preventing recidivism by sex offenders needs an effective, multi-faceted approach, from investigation to capture, from charge to prosecution, from sentence to release and, finally, from community supervision and treatment to rehabilitation.

A sex offender registry, in whatever form it ultimately may take, is just one piece of this very big puzzle. It will be no panacea, but if we do it right and do it carefully maybe it can work. If we are careful it will not be a strain on police resources, it will not drive violent sexual predators underground and it will not bring a flood of charter challenges.

I urge my colleagues on all sides of the House to give our federal-provincial-territorial officials a chance to do their work, to reach a consensus and to evaluate the options. At that time we will be in a much better position to know where we should be headed, what legislation to support and how best to make our children safe.

Let us take the necessary time to study the issue carefully and positively. Let us take the necessary measures to enact effective strategies that will protect our children and indeed to protect all Canadians.

• (1355)

Mr. Randy White (Langley—Abbotsford, Canadian Alliance): Madam Speaker, I do not know what to say about that speech. We do not need a sex offender registry but we are building one. I have heard more contradictions in that speech today than in most speeches in the House.

What really escapes me, however, in the comments my colleague on the Liberal side made, is that we do not need a registry that is convoluted, costs a lot of money, drives offenders underground and makes criminals out of people. I think he also said that we should study this for a long time and make sure it is done right and conclusively.

It seems to me that this is the government that brought in something called a gun registry quickly, which drove more innocent Canadians underground, and that cost somewhere we think in the neighbourhood of \$650 million.

Does the member opposite think the gun registry was a darn good idea? Could he also tell us why that registry, such as it is, was such a great idea and a national sex offender registry is not a good idea?

Mr. John Maloney: Madam Speaker, if my friend wants to know what to say about that speech, I will say it was an excellent speech.

We have the CPIC system which is already in existence. We have a national security system. We have a system that is in place that can be improved upon. However we should be looking with our partners, the provinces and the territories, at how to implement a system that would be effective, cost efficient and would thereby protect all the children. Is the gun registry a good system? Yes. I think it is an excellent system. Gun control is effective and necessary. It is something that all members in the House should be advocating.

Mr. Jay Hill (Prince George—Peace River, PC/DR): Madam Speaker, as with my colleague from the Canadian Alliance, I cannot believe the speech that the member for Erie—Lincoln just delivered. It was unbelievable. I hope there are a lot of Canadians out there watching the sad display of a speech in the House about the need for a national sex offender registry.

He talked at great length about how the provinces had to buy in, that there had to be agreement from the provinces and that we had to look at what was successful in other countries. Yet that was not the case with the now infamous firearms registry. The government forged ahead no matter that the majority of the provinces were opposed to it. The majority of Canadians were opposed to it, the ones who at least understood what was happening with that registry. The cost has been astronomical.

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

• (1400)

[Translation]

MONTFORT HOSPITAL

Mr. Eugène Bellemare (Ottawa—Orléans, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is with great pride that I rise to speak today. I would like the House to recognize the tremendous efforts made by Gisèle Lalonde and the committee to save the Montfort hospital during the last five years.

Last Friday, the Ontario government announced that it accepted the decision of the Court of Appeal of Ontario. This court found that the Montfort hospital was essential to the survival of the French language community in Ontario and that the rights of that community were guaranteed by the constitution. This is a victory for all Franco-Ontarians, as well as for all francophones in Canada.

My colleagues join with me in paying tribute to the perseverance of Gisèle Lalonde and her committee. The battle has been a long one, but we have come out of it stronger and more unified.

More than ever, I am proud to be a Franco-Ontarian.

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[English]

NATIONAL DEFENCE

Mr. Brian Fitzpatrick (Prince Albert, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, the dark shadow of the Liberals continues to loom over the Canadian armed forces. First the Liberals eradicated the army, navy and air force with an ill-conceived policy of unification. Then they took the word armed out of Canadian armed forces. Now they want to get rid of the Canadian identification and just call it forces.

S. O. 31

Is there a Liberal in the House who can tell Canadians and our men and women in uniform what this is all about? Apparently this accelerated assault on our Canadian military heritage is being driven by a desire to connect with young people.

When the Liberals learn that our Canadian military heritage is what attracts young people to the military we will be accomplishing something. Renaming or disguising the armed forces will not attract new recruits; it will only further tarnish the image of a once proud institution.

* * *

MEMBER FOR CALGARY EAST

Mr. Dominic LeBlanc (Beauséjour—Petitcodiac, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise to extend my best wishes to the hon. member for Calgary East who underwent successful heart surgery yesterday.

I had the privilege of getting to know the member for Calgary East before my election to the House when we were on the same trip to Africa in 1999. I was with him when he made a triumphant return to his old high school in Arusha, Tanzania. I learned much about this country from him.

I am sure all hon. members join me in wishing the member for Calgary East a speedy and full recovery, and a quick return to the House.

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RESEARCH AND TECHNOLOGY

Mr. Paul Harold Macklin (Northumberland, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is with great pleasure that I rise in the House to pay tribute to the members of my research, innovation and technology advisory committee which just presented me with their final report.

Last January, when I first gathered this group together, I asked them to look at my riding of Northumberland and work with stakeholders to form a vision for the technological future of my riding. It was my feeling that as a rural riding we faced unique challenges in the new economy that needed to be addressed quickly.

The hard work done by all members of this group has had long lasting effects right across my riding. In the coming months I look forward to working with the many stakeholders to implement many of the recommendations in the report.

I wish to express my sincere thanks to chair Susan Hale and the committee members for their great spirit of volunteerism that has led to this report.

* * *

BOREAL FOREST

Hon. Charles Caccia (Davenport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Canada is home to the world's largest remaining wilderness forest. Our boreal forest is a beautiful wilderness area with millions of square kilometres of sensitive woodlands, wetlands, fast flowing rivers and deep lakes, which protect caribou, wolves, bears, migrating birds, et cetera. Canada's boreal forest is increasingly under threat from logging, mining, oil exploration and hydroelectric dams.

S. O. 31

Let us remember that the boreal forest played a vital role in our nation's history. Native peoples, and later voyageurs, used its mighty rivers to travel and discover this country.

Canada's boreal forest is a great legacy. Governments, federal and provincial, must ensure its protection. I ask Canadians to let their elected representatives know how strongly they disapprove of the heavy logging of the boreal forest. Future generations deserve the protection of this most valuable common good.

* * *

• (1405)

[*Translation*]**CAMBODIA**

Mr. Antoine Dubé (Lévis-et-Chutes-de-la-Chaudière, BQ): Mr. Speaker, on Sunday, February 3, Cambodia held its first local elections. Over 1,000 foreign observers were present for this historic event, which represents one more step towards the introduction of real democracy in this country, which has been ravaged by more than two decades of dictatorship and civil war.

Cambodia's local elections are a step in the direction of increased representation of the rural population, which accounts for almost 85% of the country's 11 million inhabitants. Preliminary results indicate that Prime Minister Hun Sen's Cambodian People's Party won a majority in the 76 communes.

However, these results are disputed by human rights defence groups, which have noted irregularities. In addition, the election campaign was punctuated by violence, with eight candidates and a dozen activists losing their lives. The Cambodian government will therefore have to work to improve the safety and transparency of the next elections.

For its part, the international community must pursue its efforts to help the Cambodian people build a modern and democratic state.

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[*English*]**POVERTY**

Ms. Libby Davies (Vancouver East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, what is the cost of poverty? There is a terrible human cost in our local communities and in our economy overall, but how does one measure the cost of hopelessness when individuals know they have no future and no dignity?

The National Council of Welfare report released today is evidence of another nail in the coffin of failed public policy and a Liberal government that has failed to address the growing crisis of income inequality. Why does Canada have a poverty rate of 25% for single mothers compared to a low of 3% in Sweden? Because the government sacrificed its social agenda for tax cuts and a fiscal agenda that actually widens the gap between the wealthy and the poor.

Canada is a wealthy country, with adequate resources to ensure that Ed Broadbent's 1989 resolution to eliminate child poverty is realizable. While the Prime Minister says he has a vision to eliminate global poverty, and we support that, let us make it a political and economic priority right here in Canada today.

ARTS AND CULTURE

Mr. Rodger Cuzner (Bras d'Or—Cape Breton, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the widely held assumption that Cape Breton Island remains the heart and soul of the east coast music industry was reaffirmed this past Sunday night in Saint John, New Brunswick, at the 14th annual East Coast Music Awards. This reaffirmation came not once but twelve times.

It is not just the sheer number of awards picked up by Cape Breton artists but the scope and diversity of the artists acknowledged. From the alternative rockers, the Jimmy Swift Band, to the traditional sounds of Mary Jane Lamond, as well as the outstanding songwriting abilities of Gordie Sampson, this event allowed Cape Breton artists to showcase their talents.

Two of Canada's most prolific singer-songwriters, Jimmy Rankin and Bruce Guthro, picked up three awards each and the reigning queen of Celtic music, Miss Natalie MacMaster, was crowned ECMA entertainer of the year.

It gives me great pleasure to congratulate all the 2002 ECMA winners. Cape Bretoners are very proud of their accomplishments and wish them all continued success.

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EQUALIZATION FORMULA

Mr. Norman Doyle (St. John's East, PC/DR): Mr. Speaker, during the last federal election the equalization formula was a major political issue in Atlantic Canada. The clawback allows the federal government to cream off 80% of all provincial revenues that we get from new resource development.

For too long Atlantic Canadians have been hewers of wood and drawers of water in our own nation, in exchange for the half a loaf that we call equalization. In Newfoundland and Labrador today the Hibernia and Terra Nova oilfields are up and running and the White Rose oil development will be our next project.

These days Atlantic Canadians may be pumping oil but as long as the lion's share of the financial benefits ends up in Ottawa we are no better off than we were before we started these projects. It is time the Liberals stopped talking about the equalization clawback and actually did something about it.

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GOLDEN JUBILEE

Mr. Jason Kenney (Calgary Southeast, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, 50 years ago tomorrow the 25 year old Princess Elizabeth was awoken in a safari lodge in Kenya to learn that her father, King George VI, had died. She ascended to the throne as the 40th monarch since William the Conqueror and as the fifth sovereign of Canada since Confederation.

Since that moment she has dedicated herself unswervingly to her duty as the head of state of dozens of countries, the head of the Commonwealth, the patron of hundreds of organizations and regiments and, of course, as our Queen of Canada.

Her Majesty, to whom each of us in the House has sworn allegiance, opened parliament in 1957 on her first of 20 official visits to Canada. As we prepare for her golden jubilee visit in October, it is my hope that she will again be invited to do so in a concrete demonstration that the crown remains an integral element of parliament, what Eugene Forsey described as “the first principle of Canadian government”.

We as members of this place will come and go depending on the political fashions of the day. But the Crown goes on as the ultimate symbol of order and continuity in our constitutional monarchy. Queen Elizabeth's 50 years of selfless service have personified our crown with dignity and grace.

Long may she reign. God save the Queen. Vive la reine.

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● (1410)

[Translation]

THÉRÈSE DAVIAU

Mrs. Marlene Jennings (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is with great sadness that I rise to pay tribute today to Thérèse Daviau, who passed away on February 1.

She will long be remembered for her great energy, both on the Montreal political scene, where she was active for many years, and in her professional life.

As well, Thérèse Daviau suffered the terribly tragic loss of her daughter Geneviève, who was among the 14 victims of the École Polytechnique massacre on December 6, 1989. In its aftermath, Thérèse Daviau courageously devoted a great deal of her energies and generosity to the December 6 Victims Foundation Against Violence and worked tirelessly on behalf of gun control.

[English]

For all these reasons and more, Thérèse Daviau was an outstanding model for countless women wishing to get involved in public life. Her commitment and devotion to the many causes dear to her were a striking example of what women can do to make the world a better place.

I offer my sincerest condolences to Thérèse Daviau's family and friends. She will be truly missed.

* * *

[Translation]

MONTFORT HOSPITAL

Mr. Benoît Sauvageau (Repentigny, BQ): Mr. Speaker, last Friday marked the final verdict in the Montfort hospital case. As we had hoped, the Ontario government agreed to accept the decision of the Court of Appeal of Ontario, which recognized the indispensable role of Montfort Hospital in allowing francophone communities to achieve their full potential.

S. O. 31

I extend the congratulations of the Bloc Québécois to all those who have stood up for their beliefs over the past five years and have been involved to any degree in battling for the survival of the sole French language teaching hospital west of Quebec.

My thoughts go out particularly to Gisèle Lalonde, a lady whose strong convictions inspired the vigorous resistance and spirit of an entire community. She had a large part to play in this final victory.

Calling to mind the origins of this lengthy battle, the hugeness of the task to be accomplished, and the strength of the adversary, we must acknowledge today that from the very beginning the great symbols of communities have always been built upon the exceptional perseverance, convictions and effectiveness of a handful of extraordinary men and women.

Madame Lalonde deserves our congratulations and our gratitude for this great victory.

* * *

WILLIAM POY

Mr. John Godfrey (Don Valley West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is with great sadness that I rise today to pay tribute to William Poy, who died on Sunday at the age of 94.

Mr. Poy was a great source of inspiration for his daughter, Her Excellency Adrienne Clarkson, the Governor General of Canada, and his son, Dr. Neville Poy. He was also a model of courage and perseverance for all Canadians.

[English]

Mr. Poy, who was self-educated, went to work to help support his family at the age of 12. He fought alongside the Allies in Hong Kong and received a military medal for his bravery. In 1942 he, with his wife and two small children, immigrated to Canada, where he became a successful businessman and lived to see his daughter become governor general.

His is a story of trials and tribulations but also one of great hope and possibilities open to those who make Canada their home. Mr. Poy once said “I have been in many countries, but this is the best country in the world”. I believe that this great country has been made richer because of individuals like William Poy.

I ask the House to join me in sending my condolences to the Governor General and her family at this time of loss.

* * *

NATIONAL DEFENCE

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant (Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, the decision by the Liberal government to even question the national identity of our armed forces as Canadian has shocked patriotic Canadians and angered our veterans. No wonder the confusion by the Minister of National Defence when he saw a newspaper picture of Canadian soldiers that he mistook for Americans.

Oral Questions

Interdependence, the Liberal code word for surrender, and the issuing of generic uniforms with no national identity accelerate the process of assimilation of Canada's military with that of the United States. The low Canadian dollar policy of the Liberal Party means our country is for sale cheap; Liberal water export policy sells our birthright to a thirsty southern neighbour.

Liberal policy to underman, underequip and underfund Canada's military means we no longer have the means to defend ourselves as an independent nation. In the words of one Canadian newspaper, the Minister of National Defence is famous for blustering his way through questions with sly misinformation.

If Canadians love their country, Canada, they should look beyond Liberal propaganda and listen to the official opposition before it is too late.

* * *

• (1415)

ABORIGINAL AFFAIRS

Miss Deborah Grey (Edmonton North, PC/DR): Mr. Speaker, it seems that the junior minister of Indian Affairs is trying to make his mark in his new portfolio through hyperbole and fearmongering.

The secretary of state for Indian Affairs and Northern Development compared Canada's native youth population to young Palestinian militants, calling our native communities a "tinderbox" ready to blow if treaties are not resolved.

The junior minister does a tremendous disservice to aboriginals in this country through such inflammatory comments. The vast majority of aboriginal Canadians are peaceful people and he knows it. Alarmist rhetoric from the governing party can only hinder the already tenuous relationship between the federal government and our native peoples.

The secretary of state would be well advised to focus on constructive solutions to the problems facing Canada's aboriginal population rather than relying on this cheap, headline grabbing nonsense.

Why should Canada's aboriginals trust a government that whips up fear and suspicion against them. Shame.

ORAL QUESTION PERIOD

[English]

FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Mr. John Reynolds (Leader of the Opposition, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, the government did not give proper camouflage uniforms to our troops in Afghanistan but it has lots of camouflage for the Prime Minister and the Minister of National Defence.

The committee investigating the minister's statements must find out when the Prime Minister was told about the capture of al-Qaeda agents and their handover to the United States. Yesterday the government House leader said that the committee would not look into when the Prime Minister or his office were informed.

What do the Prime Minister and his staff know about the capture of al-Qaeda terrorists that they want to hide from the committee?

Hon. John Manley (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Infrastructure and Crown Corporations, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we have been through this for a number of days now.

The Prime Minister made it clear when he learned about the capture of prisoners by Canadian soldiers. The minister of defence has explained at length when he obtained knowledge and what he did with it. The committee has every opportunity to ask the minister of defence further questions about it.

The point is that it is ministers who are accountable to the House, not officials.

Mr. John Reynolds (Leader of the Opposition, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, the government's camouflage for the Prime Minister is not forest green or desert sand, but a little more grey fog.

Last Monday, a full week after the minister of defence was informed about the handover of al-Qaeda terrorists to the U.S., the Prime Minister called the issue hypothetical. How could a week have gone by with the entire apparatus of the PMO, the PCO and foreign affairs not knowing about this significant international incident?

Hon. Art Eggleton (Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as has been said many times in the House over the past few days, the JTF2, for purposes of national security, is not talked about in terms of its operations or in terms of the individuals involved.

Mr. John Reynolds (Leader of the Opposition, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, yesterday the Deputy Prime Minister said that we should not be on a witch hunt for civil servants, and we agree. The Prime Minister himself must be accountable for his staff and his department.

Will the Prime Minister stand in his place and tell us that for a full week after the prisoners were handed over to the United States nobody in his office or the Privy Council had been informed?

Hon. John Manley (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Infrastructure and Crown Corporations, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister was informed on Tuesday at cabinet. The Minister of National Defence has explained when he learned and when he informed the Prime Minister. Those are the two people, the Prime Minister and the Minister of National Defence, who are accountable to this House to answer those questions.

The point still remains that at a time when we have Canadian soldiers representing us in a difficult and tense situation in Afghanistan, they are doing the job they are supposed to be doing. They acted in accordance with their instructions and they are acting in accordance with international law. Those are the key points.

Mr. Rahim Jaffer (Edmonton—Strathcona, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, they are doing the job in spite of this government.

[Translation]

Yesterday, the minister said that he would not table the chain of command for incidents regarding JTF2, but we are demanding that the House determine whether the minister misled the Commons as to the exact moment when he was informed of the incident.

Oral Questions

If he refuses to table the chain of command, how can we determine exactly what happened?

• (1420)

[*English*]

Hon. John Manley (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Infrastructure and Crown Corporations, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, they are doing the job because of the government's confidence in them and because we know the job they have to perform. We see the role they are there to do. They are doing it professionally and they are doing it well.

[*Translation*]

It is not necessary for the hon. member to obtain the chain of command. We already stated very clearly the dates on which the ministers received the information. This is all the information they need.

[*English*]

Mr. Rahim Jaffer (Edmonton—Strathcona, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, the Deputy Prime Minister knows full well that we are not asking for confidential information. We are asking for who knew what, when.

By his own admission, he presented two contradictory versions of what happened to the House. We cannot take the minister's word for it and now the minister will not tell us what the proper reporting procedure was.

How can we evaluate which of the minister's stories were true if he will not inform us of the protocol as to how he is kept informed?

Hon. John Manley (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Infrastructure and Crown Corporations, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the opposition will have plenty of opportunity to ask questions in committee about when the minister knew what. He has already explained that he made a mistake. He has explained his embarrassment, but the opposition feels it has to keep repeating this day after day.

There is no further embarrassment to be had. The minister has admitted his mistake. Now is the time for us to voice our solidarity with our men and women who are in a dangerous situation risking their personal safety on our behalf.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, on January 29 the Prime Minister stated in the House that Canada had concluded an agreement with the Americans on the transfer of prisoners captured in Afghanistan, an agreement under which the United States apparently made a commitment to respect the Geneva convention. This is what he said.

Can the Deputy Prime Minister tell us today exactly when this agreement was concluded with the Americans regarding the Geneva convention?

Hon. John Manley (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Infrastructure and Crown Corporations, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this is not a legal issue. There was an understanding between all of the governments involved in the situation in Afghanistan that the Geneva conventions will apply. It was understood when, for example, article 5 of the NATO treaty was invoked.

It is only in these past few days, when representatives of the American government explained that there might not be any process to determine the status of the prisoners, that we raised the issue. It has been raised and we want a clarification.

Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ): Clearly, Mr. Speaker, the Deputy Prime Minister is incapable of giving us a date, because there likely never was an agreement on the transfer of prisoners, and it is even less likely that there was one at the time when the prisoners were transferred.

When the minister says, "We want a clarification", what he means to say is—and I wanted him to confirm this—that there was an agreement that was not clear and that we want to clarify it today.

Is this what the Deputy Prime Minister means by clarity?

Hon. John Manley (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Infrastructure and Crown Corporations, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member is trying to complicate the situation more than is necessary.

In fact, all combatants have clearly understood that international laws will apply. Even the U.S.A. has assumed that position to date and even accepts that the Geneva conventions will apply. It is merely a matter of finding out whether there is a proper process, in the opinion of ourselves and the other allies, to determine the status of the detainees.

Mr. Claude Bachand (Saint-Jean, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of National Defence has said that the Geneva conventions are being complied with in the case of the prisoners taken in Afghanistan. These conventions call for a tribunal to determine the status of these prisoners.

Can the minister tell us which tribunal has reached a decision, or is going to reach a decision, on the way these prisoners are to be handled, in compliance with the Geneva conventions?

[*English*]

Hon. Art Eggleton (Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Geneva conventions call for competent tribunals if there is any doubt as to the status.

The United States claims that of all of the people it is keeping there is no doubt as to status, that it is only keeping people who are terrorists. However, continuing discussions are going on with respect to the matter of how in fact those determinations are made.

• (1425)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Claude Bachand (Saint-Jean, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the minister says that he negotiated an agreement with the United States pursuant to international law.

How can he reconcile his claims with President Bush's comments, to the effect that there will not be any tribunal—President Bush has already stated this—and that these prisoners do not have prisoner of war status? How can he reconcile his comments with those of President Bush?

*Oral Questions**[English]*

Hon. Art Eggleton (Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it has been the Canadian position that international law must be observed and Canadian law must be observed. Part of international law allows for prisoners who are taken to be transferred to another country, as they are in this case, as long as international law and the Geneva conventions are followed.

Right from the beginning, the United States has given us that assurance.

Ms. Alexa McDonough (Halifax, NDP): Mr. Speaker, for a whole month we have been seeking clarification about Canada's handling of captives in Afghanistan, and the question has never been hypothetical.

It is not good enough for the Prime Minister to say that he did not know about the captives. Either his office and the Clerk of the Privy Council did know what was going on and did not tell the Prime Minister, which is a problem, or the Prime Minister's Office did not know what was going on, and that is an even bigger problem. Which one is it?

Hon. John Manley (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Infrastructure and Crown Corporations, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, from the beginning of our involvement in the war against terrorism, it has been understood that the international laws of conflict apply and therefore the Geneva conventions apply. That has been consistently the position of Canada and we hold to that position. It has also been the position of the United States.

Consequently, there was no confusion over the turning over of prisoners to the United States. Only in the last two weeks or so have some statements been made by representatives of the U.S. administration that have cast doubt on whether there was an adequate process for determining the status of prisoners. That is what we are seeking to clarify.

Ms. Alexa McDonough (Halifax, NDP): Mr. Speaker, confusion continues to reign with this government. The defence minister changes his story about Canadians taking prisoners. The government says that it respects international law but recklessly claims that the Geneva conventions are outdated.

An agreement with the U.S. on the status of detainees was to have been in place but now we learn that negotiations are ongoing.

Will the Prime Minister take charge and ensure that captives taken in Afghanistan are treated as prisoners of war in accordance with the Geneva conventions unless and until an independent tribunal deems otherwise?

Hon. John Manley (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Infrastructure and Crown Corporations, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is very touching that the member is so concerned about the condition of al-Qaeda prisoners. However no questions have been raised by the international committee of the Red Cross or anyone else about the treatment of the prisoners.

I also point out what Mr. Rumsfeld said the other day in a television interview. He said:

I think that everyone has agreed that under the Geneva Convention that the United States has been, is today, and will in the future treat them—will apply the Geneva

Convention and see that they have the appropriate rights under the Geneva Convention.

That is what we were seeking to obtain clarification about.

* * *

MINISTER OF NATIONAL DEFENCE

Right Hon. Joe Clark (Calgary Centre, PC/DR): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Deputy Prime Minister.

The Minister of National Defence has told the House that JTF2 reports only to him and only orally. He has said that he then decides, all by his lonesome, whether the Prime Minister will be informed.

Is the government telling the House that the only way the Prime Minister and his government know about the operations of JTF2 is if the Minister of National Defence remembers what he has been told or deems it important enough to pass on?

Hon. Art Eggleton (Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it would be my responsibility to tell the Prime Minister, in case there is any deviation from government policy, if anything out of the ordinary happens with respect to any of these matters involving the JTF2.

The JTF2 is conducting itself completely within the terms of the rules of engagement, completely within Canadian law and completely within government policy.

The JTF2 was sent there to be part of the mission to flush out the terrorists and arrests are a normal part of that mission. The fact that they have taken prisoners should not come as a surprise to anybody.

Right Hon. Joe Clark (Calgary Centre, PC/DR): Mr. Speaker, it will not be a surprise for at least eight days with this minister.

My supplementary question is for the Deputy Prime Minister.

The Pentagon has proposed an Americas command that would put Canadian troops and ships under an integrated command. Canada's vice-chief of defence staff, General Macdonald, said that Canada "declared ourselves ready to consider an arrangement that could extend to land and sea". I wonder if the Prime Minister has been told about this.

I wonder if the Deputy Prime Minister can tell the House whether Canadian officials are now discussing a major extension of Norad. If the Deputy Prime Minister knows this and if he will tell the House what is being discussed, I wonder if he would come before parliament—

• (1430)

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of National Defence.

Hon. Art Eggleton (Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the United States, under its attempts to improve its homeland security, is looking at a change in its command structure. In doing that, it will have an effect on what we do here because we are part of the same continent. We want to make sure we know what it is doing. We want to make sure it will not have an adverse effect on Norad. We have been in consultations with the U.S. No commitments of any kind are being made until there is a whole government discussion on the matter.

FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Mr. Brian Pallister (Portage—Lisgar, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, on January 16 the Department of National Defence said that Canadian soldiers would treat any captured prisoners as POWs until a special tribunal determined their status. The next day the minister of defence said that we would hand over prisoners to the United States without holding tribunals, and in fact we did so. Now the Minister of Foreign Affairs is asking the United States to set up tribunals that we did not need.

My question for the Minister of Foreign Affairs is this. If we did not need tribunals two weeks ago why do we need them today?

Hon. Bill Graham (Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): What we need, Mr. Speaker, is for the people opposite us in the House to read the Geneva convention instead of interpreting it their way and trying to mislead the Canadian people on what the Geneva convention says. That is what we need.

Article 5 of the Geneva convention, if they would put it on their desks, says “in case of doubt...a tribunal”. We said that our prisoners would be treated in accordance with international law. They are being treated in accordance with international law. We have obeyed international law and we will continue to do so.

Mr. Brian Pallister (Portage—Lisgar, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, might I suggest a learn to read week for the Liberal caucus and perhaps the new minister could read it to his other colleagues in the front bench. They do not know what it says.

Clearly, handing over al-Qaeda terrorists to face justice is the right thing to do, but the government is second and third guessing its own policies. It has no clue about its own policies. The fact of the matter is DND said it would hand over prisoners without a tribunal, then the minister contradicted that and the foreign affairs minister is contradicting that.

Our troops did great work in capturing al-Qaeda terrorists. If the government believes our troops did the right thing, why is it changing its policies?

Hon. Bill Graham (Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I apologize for raising the tone in the House. I do not think it is helpful for members of the House to suggest there is confusion where there is not.

We have always said that we would act in accordance with international law. What we have also said is there are differences in interpretation of international law. The Deputy Prime Minister has said that we are resolving that as is proper in an amicable way with our most important ally, the United States of America.

[Translation]

Ms. Francine Lalonde (Mercier, BQ): Mr. Speaker, yesterday the Minister of National Defence said that the Geneva conventions had been written at an earlier time and were therefore not easily applicable to the conditions that exist today.

Why then did the hon. minister tell us on January 28 that Canada would respect not just any international law, but the Geneva conventions?

Hon. Bill Graham (Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, what the Minister of National Defence said, if I may put it another way, was that the conditions contemplated when the Geneva

Oral Questions

convention was drafted have changed considerably. I think this is just plain common sense. Everyone in the House knows this.

Everyone also knows that the interpretation of the convention is being discussed. Members on this side know that we are respecting the Geneva convention and that we are interpreting international law as it now stands. We must respect the fact that discussions are still taking place as to how international law should be interpreted.

● (1435)

Ms. Francine Lalonde (Mercier, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the values in the name of which the war in Afghanistan was launched require that these same values be respected in the continuation of that war.

Will the Minister of Foreign Affairs tell us how Canada can have concluded with the United States an agreement which respects the Geneva conventions, when the Minister of National Defence says they are not applicable?

Hon. Bill Graham (Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I repeat what I said earlier. The Geneva convention is not inapplicable. It is applied differently. This is where the discussion of international law comes in. Obviously, lawyers can disagree, and the member knows this as well as I do.

What is important is that our values support respect for international law. That is what we have always done in this House and on the battlefields to which we send our troops.

* * *

[English]

MINISTER OF NATIONAL DEFENCE

Mr. Leon Benoit (Lakeland, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, again today the defence minister said that the JTF2 followed the rules of engagement with respect to the capture of the al-Qaeda terrorists. Yet the minister contradicted himself when he said last week that the rules of engagement had not been finalized.

When were the rules established for the JTF2 and who signed off on them?

Hon. Art Eggleton (Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the rules of engagement for the JTF2 were signed off on before they went into the theatre of operations in Afghanistan by the CDS, who consulted with me on them. By and large, they are mostly the same typical rules of engagement that we would use, but they are adapted to the specific situation.

The rules of engagement to which he have referred has to do with the PPCLI battle group that now has its rules of engagement as it is entering Afghanistan.

Mr. Leon Benoit (Lakeland, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, we got an answer on that. The minister said that he signed off on the rules of engagement. The minister has also said that the Prime Minister has to sign off on any mission that the JTF2 goes on overseas.

When the Prime Minister signs off on those missions, does he also sign off on the rules of engagement?

Oral Questions

Hon. Art Eggleton (Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister fully understands on what basis our troops are going over there. That kind of authority is sought. I consult with the Minister of Foreign Affairs and the Prime Minister any time a mission is contemplated and on the rules and the basis on which the mission will be conducted.

* * *

[Translation]

CULTURAL DIVERSITY

Ms. Caroline St-Hilaire (Longueuil, BQ): Mr. Speaker, as part of the world social forum in Pôrto Alegre, representatives of the civil society adopted a proposal that seeks to create an international instrument to protect and promote cultural diversity.

Could the Minister for International Trade tell us whether he intends to support the idea of creating this instrument to protect cultural diversity?

Hon. Pierre Pettigrew (Minister for International Trade, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as we know, when it comes to cultural diversity, this government has always worked very closely with the Quebec government and with governments which, on the international scene, share our commitment to support cultural diversity.

We worked very closely with the French government. I am pleased by the progress achieved through this concept of cultural diversity in countries other than ours and France. It is very important to get the support of Central and Latin American countries.

It is extremely important, because this is a fundamental issue in this era of globalization, and we must be able to preserve and promote our individual cultures.

Ms. Caroline St-Hilaire (Longueuil, BQ): Mr. Speaker, still in the context of that forum, the Quebec government put forward an amendment “to exclude culture from the principles of liberalization and merchandising”.

Could the minister make clear whether he is prepared to pledge in this House that culture be excluded from WTO negotiations, so that it never becomes a merchandise?

[English]

Ms. Sarmite Bulte (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Canadian Heritage, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as the hon. member probably knows, in 1999 the cultural SAGIT recommended to the Minister for International Trade that we take culture outside of the general trade instruments. As a result of that, our Minister of Canadian Heritage started the International Network for Cultural Policy. At that time there were 18 countries. Now that number is 45 countries.

They decided at their last meeting in Switzerland that we would be part of the working group drafting that agreement which will be ready when the countries meet again in September.

• (1440)

FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Mr. Stockwell Day (Okanagan—Coquihalla, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, I am moved that my Liberal friends missed me but do not despair, I promise them I will be coming back.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear.

The Speaker: Order, please. Obviously the member is very popular but we do have to get on with question period.

Mr. Stockwell Day: I know their memberships are in the mail, Mr. Speaker.

On Sunday Condoleezza Rice said that Chairman Arafat needed to deal with the terrorist in his midst. She went on to say that he knew that the *Karine-A* affair, which was the shipment of arms purchased from Iran and shipped through Hezbollah, was a violation of the Oslo accords. Yet Canada, through CIDA, is one of the largest sponsors of the Palestinian authority and even gave \$250,000 to the Palestinian coast guard.

Will the Minister of Foreign Affairs commit today that no more Canadian taxpayer dollars will go to fund the Palestinian authority until Chairman Arafat clearly takes action and not words against terrorism?

Hon. Bill Graham (Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I can commit to the House on behalf of the Government of Canada to maintain our policy to ensure that all acts we take in the Middle East are those which ensure a movement toward peace and establishing peace in that very troubled region.

The helping of Palestinians and the helping of those who are in trouble is part of what Canada is about. We will continue our policies to ensure that we stop terrorism, but at the same time enable people to get on with their lives.

Mr. Stockwell Day (Okanagan—Coquihalla, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, we would like to see a policy of funding the Canadian coast guard instead of the Palestinian coast guard. Not only is Canada funding Yasser Arafat, we are also playing footsie with Hamas and Hezbollah.

Others recognize Hamas and Hezbollah as terrorist organizations. Yet amazingly the foreign affairs spokesperson said that these organizations perform many legitimate functions and enjoy widespread popular support. They are not too popular among the people whose family members have been destroyed by these organizations.

Does the minister believe—

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Prime Minister.

Hon. John Manley (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Infrastructure and Crown Corporations, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I know the hon. member has been campaigning in the Gaspé and he may have missed a few things. Many weeks ago Hamas and Hezbollah were listed as terrorist organizations by the Government of Canada.

I would also like to point out to him that Canadian overseas assistance does not go to the Palestinian authority, not a dime of it. We do support programs that assist Palestinians, but not the Palestinian authority.

Oral Questions

These are important distinctions. The hon. member should know better than to suggest—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Ottawa—Vanier.

* * *

[*Translation*]

OFFICIAL LANGUAGES

Mr. Mauril Bélanger (Ottawa—Vanier, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, francophone communities in Canada have recently won major legal victories with respect to education in Prince Edward Island, municipal affairs in New Brunswick, and health, here in Ottawa, with the Montfort decision.

Can the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs please tell us where the Government of Canada stands with respect to these decisions, particularly the decision regarding the Montfort hospital, which is in the heart of the riding that I have the honour of representing in the House?

Hon. Stéphane Dion (President of the Queen's Privy Council for Canada and Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member for Ottawa—Vanier has mentioned a series of impressive legal victories for official language communities, particularly the Montfort case in his riding, a case he worked hard on himself.

We must express our delight and congratulate all of those who worked for this victory, particularly Ms. Lalonde, not only on behalf of the Montfort hospital and Franco-Ontarians, but for all official language communities.

The Government of Canada, which was an intervenor in this case, will not hesitate to serve in this role again, each time it is necessary in order to enable Canada's linguistic duality to flourish.

* * *

[*English*]

FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Mr. Svend Robinson (Burnaby—Douglas, NDP): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Foreign Affairs. His colleague, the Minister of National Defence, has suggested that the Geneva conventions were outdated, but the legal director of the International Committee of the Red Cross has said that we have had new types of conflicts as well as classic wars, but the fundamental rules are the same.

The Minister of Foreign Affairs knows that one of those fundamental rules is article 12 of the Geneva convention which states that we cannot turn over prisoners of war unless we are satisfied that they are being treated under the provisions of the Geneva convention.

In view of the Deputy Prime Minister's statement that there is doubt about that now, will he assure Canadians that no prisoners will be turned over until that doubt has been fully resolved?

• (1445)

Hon. Bill Graham (Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this matter has been discussed in the House at length. The policy of the government is clear, which is, we respect international law. It was correct for us to turn prisoners over to the United States

and it will be as long as we have its engagement that it is respecting the terms of the Geneva convention, which engagement it has given us.

Mr. Svend Robinson (Burnaby—Douglas, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Deputy Prime Minister just said a few minutes ago that we do not have that engagement. In his words, there is doubt that a process is in place. As long as that doubt is in place, how can we say we are respecting the Geneva conventions and article 12?

Why is the government showing such contempt for Canadian law and international law?

Hon. John Manley (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Infrastructure and Crown Corporations, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I will try to be clear on this. We are seeking clarification of some statements that have been made by U.S. authorities. I have also cited the most recent one in which Secretary Rumsfeld confirms that the Geneva convention is being applied. Nevertheless, we would like full clarification in view of some things that have been said.

Let me be perfectly clear. Canadian soldiers are doing their job in accordance with their instructions, including turning prisoners over to U.S. authorities. If necessary, they will continue to do so until we conclude that the U.S. is not respecting the Geneva convention.

Mr. Chuck Strahl (Fraser Valley, PC/DR): Mr. Speaker, earlier today in question period the Minister of National Defence said that we have assurances from the U.S. that the U.S. will respect the Geneva convention. Then he went on to say that the U.S. considers these prisoners not prisoners of war but simply terrorists. In other words, the Geneva convention does not apply because the U.S. has already determined that it does not apply.

The question is, is this acceptable to the Canadian government? Does the Geneva convention apply only when it is convenient for someone or does it apply to everybody?

Hon. Art Eggleton (Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, obviously the member does not understand the Geneva conventions and the law of armed conflict or he would understand that in fact there are provisions both for prisoners of war and for unlawful combatants within their provisions.

What the United States is saying is that it is not interested in prisoners of war. It is only interested in the terrorists who are unlawful combatants and that is the basis on which it is detaining people.

Mr. Chuck Strahl (Fraser Valley, PC/DR): It is kind of important, Mr. Speaker, to determine how that determination is made.

Yesterday when asked what assurance he could give the House that the tribunals would be in place to determine the status of prisoners taken in Afghanistan, the Minister of National Defence said "we have had the assurances of the United States government". Yet later in the day the Deputy Prime Minister stated "Some comments out of Washington have suggested that there's no need for" tribunals and "We don't agree with that, and that's what we're trying to work around".

Oral Questions

I ask the defence minister, which is it? Are there tribunals in place, as he assured the House yesterday, or do we have a concern for the process, as the Deputy Prime Minister said?

Hon. Art Eggleton (Minister of National Defence, Lib.): We do have a concern about the process, Mr. Speaker. We want to make sure that the United States continues to abide by international law in dealing with this matter. It assures us that it is, that it is in fact only detaining unlawful combatants and making a determination as to their status.

We are pursuing the matter with the United States because there are provisions for competent tribunals if there is any doubt as to the status of any of these detainees. There is a question, however, as to whether that is in question or not and that is the current point of discussion with the United States.

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GRANTS AND CONTRIBUTIONS

Mr. Charlie Penson (Peace River, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, last March Magellan Aerospace of Toronto won an \$8 million loan from the Technology Partnerships Canada program, but Canadians know nothing about this because the government has not told them yet.

Yesterday a TPC press conference was cancelled because the local Liberal MP backbencher was called back to Ottawa for the vote on closure.

I would like to ask the Minister of Industry, what is more important to the government, informing Canadians where their tax dollars are going or photo ops for its Liberal MPs?

• (1450)

Hon. Allan Rock (Minister of Industry, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, despite uninformed commentary to the contrary, Technology Partnerships Canada is an important source of investment for emerging and growing industry in the country. If it were not for Technology Partnerships Canada, Canada would not have given the world the BlackBerry, which is known throughout the globe as an important Canadian innovation and is used by many members of the House. These investments are good for the economy and they are good for Canada.

Mr. Charlie Penson (Peace River, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, that all may be, but it is completely irrelevant to the question I put to the minister.

This is not an isolated incident. The Magellan deal was just one of six government loans worth more than \$328 million approved during last year's March madness. Yet they have not been announced by the government because TPC has not seen fit to do so. TPC has been criticized nationally and internationally for being secretive and has promised to be more transparent.

I ask the Minister of Industry, why do Canadians have to resort to access to information to find out about a loan ten months after the fact? What is the government trying to hide?

Hon. Allan Rock (Minister of Industry, Lib.): First of all, Mr. Speaker, these are not loans. They are investments and, by the way, they are investments that pay dividends to the Canadian taxpayer.

Second, we do want Canadians to know about these investments because we want them to realize that public funds are being used for the good purpose of encouraging, building and broadening industries that create jobs and bring prosperity to the country.

We are proud of the program and of what it has achieved.

* * *

[Translation]

TAXATION

Mr. Yvan Loubier (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot, BQ): Mr. Speaker, in a document which he circulated to the media, the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs twisted what Force Jeunesse said to make it sound as though there were no tax imbalance between Quebec City and Ottawa.

What Force Jeunesse said was this, "The dynamics of budgets are forcing Quebec down the path of budgetary, and therefore political, dependence on the federal government".

Does the minister still agree with Force Jeunesse?

Hon. Stéphane Dion (President of the Queen's Privy Council for Canada and Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, if I recall correctly, Force Jeunesse also said that if a province wished to increase its fiscal capacity, the simplest way for it to do so was to raise taxes.

Since the federal government has created some tax room by cutting taxes by \$100 billion over the past five years, the provinces have some leeway.

It is hard to believe that a province has a fiscal imbalance when it is lowering its taxes.

Mr. Yvan Loubier (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I would remind the minister, by the way, that Force Jeunesse has harsh words for him today, of course.

And I have another question for him. The minister took this same approach on another occasion, misrepresenting a statement by the Association des économistes du Québec. The association said, "It is the use of surplus resources by the federal government to interfere, directly or indirectly, in jurisdictions where it has no business or for arbitrary spending, that could have serious consequences".

Does the minister still agree with the Association des économistes québécois?

Hon. Stéphane Dion (President of the Queen's Privy Council for Canada and Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this is precisely what the government is not doing. It is not interfering in provincial jurisdictions.

Whenever it intervenes, it does so within its area of jurisdiction. And, if I understand correctly, when it uses its federal spending authority to help the provinces, it is asked to do more of the same, not less.

Oral Questions

[English]

IMMIGRATION

Mr. Monte Solberg (Medicine Hat, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, we have learned that immigration officials at Pearson airport now have protective equipment such as protective vests, pepper spray and batons, yet the first people who meet new arrivals at Pearson, customs officers, are not equipped with any of that protective gear at all.

I wonder if the minister responsible for domestic security could explain why that is, why there is that contradiction.

Hon. Denis Coderre (Minister of Citizenship and Immigration, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we have our ways, and I think that there is a relationship with our officers, not only with the immigration agents and with the customs agents, but also with the RCMP, and we are doing a good job.

Mr. Monte Solberg (Medicine Hat, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, I would argue the minister just did a very terrible job of answering that question.

If protective equipment is necessary for immigration officials, then why in the world would the government not ensure that customs officials, who are the first people to greet new arrivals in Canada, are not adequately protected? Why the contradiction? Why is the government not protecting our customs officials?

Hon. John Manley (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Infrastructure and Crown Corporations, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I do not know what crisis the hon. member is trying to create. Perhaps he knows of some incidents that we have not heard of, but to this date there are none that I am aware of, of customs officials and airports being threatened in any way. In addition, adequate police protection is afforded.

I think that realistically there is no need to create an apprehension of problems that do not exist.

* * *

●(1455)

JUSTICE

Mr. Janko Perić (Cambridge, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, today the House has been discussing an issue of great importance to Canadians.

The solicitor general has already said that he wants to keep improving the Canadian Police Information Centre to protect Canadians from known sex offenders.

Is he willing to consider sex offender registry legislation to impose a solution on jurisdictions with a responsibility for criminal justice?

Hon. Lawrence MacAulay (Solicitor General of Canada, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague from Cambridge for this question. This is a very important issue which I have discussed with the provinces and territories a number of times and we have made exceptional progress.

The government has taken action on a number of issues. We have invested in CPIC. We have improved CPIC as Canada's sex offender registry. We are committed to do more. We are not ruling out anything. We want to find solutions that work, solutions that make

Canadians safer and solutions that come from a consensus with our partners.

* * *

ACCESS TO INFORMATION

Mr. John Williams (St. Albert, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, the government is clamping down on the release of information to Canadians and to the media, yet we are finding more and more situations where the government has to respond to allegations of corruption and influence peddling.

Transparency is important in order to keep the government honest, so my question for the Prime Minister is, will he direct the President of the Treasury Board to reinstate the regulations of the Access to Information Act that will provide for the release of ministerial and exempt staff travel and expense account statements?

[Translation]

Hon. Lucienne Robillard (President of the Treasury Board, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member for St. Albert is asking the same question as last week, so my response will be exactly the same.

There are two pieces of legislation that we in this parliament must respect, and that departments and ministers must respect. One is the Privacy Act and the other one is the Access to Information Act.

We must always strike a balance between the two: the right to information on the one hand, and the right to protection of privacy on the other. This is the gist of the advice given by the Secretary of the Treasury Board to our government departments.

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INFRASTRUCTURE

Ms. Jocelyne Girard-Bujold (Jonquière, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the government has just indicated its intentions in connection with the administration of the infrastructure budget. Judging by the earliest indications, an independent foundation is out of the question.

Can the Minister of Finance confirm that the government has definitively put aside the idea of an independent foundation to administer the infrastructure program, and has instead decided to opt for the government to administer it, as the Bloc Québécois has been demanding ever since the budget was announced?

Hon. Paul Martin (Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I can certainly confirm that the goals, objectives and financial commitment for the foundation also apply to the funding.

I can also assure the hon. member that the government intends to proceed with the negotiations as promptly as possible, and with the successful implementation of our infrastructure program, which will certainly include those initiatives in the province of Quebec.

Supply

[English]

BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT BANK OF CANADA

Mr. Peter MacKay (Pictou—Antigonish—Guysborough, PC/DR): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister and his government have been skating around the issue of tampering with loan files at the BDC since last May.

I want to ask the new Minister of Industry to confirm that in the spring or summer of 1999, in response to the filing of an access to information request, Mr. Jean Carle and Luc Provencher, in their capacity as officials of the BDC, tampered with or removed information or sanitized files respecting the Auberge Grande-Mère loan file.

I will again ask the minister to be clear, the Minister of Industry, in feigned sincerity, to give a categorical assurance that no contents of files relating to the auberge file were removed or destroyed by officials at the Business—

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Industry.

Hon. Allan Rock (Minister of Industry, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I will take the question under advisement and provide a response when I am able to do so.

* * *

CANADIAN HERITAGE

Mr. Tony Tirabassi (Niagara Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, February 15 is national flag day of Canada, the day on which we celebrate the adoption of the Canadian maple leaf as our national flag. It presents itself as an opportunity for Canadians to celebrate our identity, our heritage and our symbols.

Since 2002 is the 37th anniversary of the maple leaf flag, could the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Canadian Heritage tell the House what the department will do to promote national flag day of Canada?

• (1500)

Ms. Sarmite Bulte (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Canadian Heritage, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I think all Canadians would agree that our flag is our country's most important symbol. It reminds us of who we are and also of the values we hold dear, values such as respect, compassion and inclusiveness.

This year the Department of Canadian Heritage has done a number of things. It has developed and distributed a national flag day of Canada poster to schools across Canada. We have also launched a website to promote public awareness, and third, we have provided members of parliament, senators and members of the celebrate Canada committee with information kits asking us to join in and celebrate national flag day on February 15.

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ACCESS TO INFORMATION

Mr. John Williams (St. Albert, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, further to my earlier question, as quoted in the *Hill Times* on February 4, the Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development and the Secretary of State for Asia-Pacific have said they will voluntarily release ministerial and exempt staff information if requested, despite the new guidelines from the treasury board.

My question is for the President of Treasury Board. Will she follow her cabinet colleagues' lead and also voluntarily agree to release information on her expense account and her department?

[Translation]

Hon. Lucienne Robillard (President of the Treasury Board, Lib.): In compliance with both pieces of legislation, Mr. Speaker, the Access to Information Act on the one hand, and the Privacy Act on the other.

When a piece of information is considered personal information, the consent of the individual concerned must absolutely be obtained before it may be disclosed and made public. It is in this context that the Treasury Board Secretariat has issued an opinion to all departments, and it is now up to them to apply it as they see fit.

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AIR TRANSPORT

Mr. Jean-Yves Roy (Matapédia—Matane, BQ): Mr. Speaker, recently Air Canada Regional announced that it was re-examining air connections to the Magdalen Islands and the Gaspé, on the dubious grounds of unprofitability. Consequently, it planned to discontinue them effective 2003.

Can the Minister of Transport tell us whether he has an action plan in mind for maintaining regional air services, those in Gaspé and Magdalen Islands in particular, and if he intends to make it public in the near future?

Hon. David Collenette (Minister of Transport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, regional air services are very important to this government and to this parliament. That is why we have included in Bill C-26 a guarantee to maintain service for three years.

I have discussed the Magdalen Islands situation with Air Canada's President, Mr. Milton, and he has assured me that the service could be maintained, for a time at least, while we re-examine our air policy.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

• (1505)

[English]

SUPPLY

ALLOTTED DAY—SEX OFFENDER REGISTRY

The House resumed consideration of the motion and of the amendment.

The Speaker: Before the House proceeded with statements by members and question period we were in questions and comments on a speech by the hon. member for Erie—Lincoln. The hon. member for Prince George—Peace River had the floor on a comment and I am pleased to welcome him back.

Mr. Jay Hill (Prince George—Peace River, PC/DR): Mr. Speaker, as you and I am sure those viewing the proceedings from home can appreciate, with all the excitement of question period it is kind of difficult to pick up the debate where we left off prior to question period.

Supply

Regarding the motion we are debating today with respect to the need for the justice committee to come up with a bill to enact a national sex offender registry, the hon. member for Erie—Lincoln stated in his remarks that it would be wrong to pass it without having examined all the pitfalls. He asked why we should not give the provincial, territorial and federal governments a chance to do their work. He talked of lessons to be learned from other countries. He suggested a national sex offender registry may be ineffective.

Can the hon. member tell the House how much longer innocent people, real and potential victims, are prepared to wait for the government to act and bring forward an effective national sex offender registry?

Mr. John Maloney: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member fails to realize that the criminal justice system does not operate in a vacuum. The federal government does not act alone. We have provincial and territorial partners with whom we must and should consult.

He also fails to recognize that there is a system in place. We have the CPIC national screening system which we instituted in 1994. Its effectiveness may be questioned and we are doing that. We put roughly \$190 million into CPIC in April 1999 to improve its standards. We have put in a further \$2 million to track sex offenders by name and address. A system is in place. It could perhaps be improved but that is what these consultations are doing. Why should we reinvent the wheel? The justice committee functions in a positive fashion but we already have a system in motion. It is effective and we should honour it.

Mr. Jay Hill: Mr. Speaker, this is helpful for those viewing the debate from home. If the CPIC which we have today, had a year ago and had the year before were effective, we would not have a situation where provinces were forced to enact their own sex offender registries. The provinces indicated clearly a year ago that if the federal government did not act soon they would be forced to follow the lead of Ontario and have their own systems.

When the motion passed in the Chamber a year ago it was clear that it was unanimous. It passed by 255 votes to zero. All political parties representing all regions of the country were interested in having a national system to track sex offenders rather than a piecemeal system across the country with various provinces trying to do the best they could on their own.

Does the hon. member for Erie—Lincoln not believe the problem is that the existing system is ineffective? Does he believe the CPIC system can be made effective despite his remarks and concerns about what is happening in other countries? We need a separate and stand-alone system in Canada. We in my party believe that. It is why we have amended the motion. Does the hon. member believe it?

• (1510)

Mr. John Maloney: Mr. Speaker, the merits of a national system are something which should be sought. However we have one in place. There is no question in my mind that we can improve on it, and that is what the consultations are about.

However why reinvent the wheel? The process is in motion and we should continue it. There is no way we can move as quickly as some provinces would like, but let us make sure we do it right this time. That is the most important thing. We do not want to establish a system that will be thrown out by the courts as has happened in other

jurisdictions. We want a system that will work properly for the protection of Canadians and especially our children.

Mr. Jay Hill: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member for Erie—Lincoln asks why we should reinvent the wheel. If the wheel is square it needs to be reinvented.

Mr. John Maloney: Mr. Speaker, I am not sure whether that was a question or a comment. We are improving the wheel. There is no question about it. It will run efficiently, smoothly and to the best of our ability and capacity.

Mr. Rick Casson (Lethbridge, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, I will be sharing my time with the member for Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca.

I pay tribute to the hon. member for Langley—Abbotsford, the official opposition House leader, for bringing the motion forward. No one on any side of the House has done more to bring justice to the country and bring issues to the floor of the House that address the safety and security of Canadian citizens.

It is to his credit that the original motion that was passed unanimously some nine months ago was brought forward both then and today. He has been doing a tremendous job on the issue. His many contacts and people across the country with whom he is in contact on a regular basis tell him he is doing the right thing. They tell him to keep the heat on the government when it comes to the issue. The security and safety of our citizens is the primary concern of any government, or it should be. It is certainly the prime concern of the Canadian Alliance Party and our House leader.

Prison reform is another issue he has brought forward time and time again. The solicitor general has not done a good job in terms of what is going on in our prisons. The hon. member for Langley—Abbotsford is constantly bringing the issue to the forefront. Canadians need to be made aware of this and other issues in the country.

The original motion was brought to the House in March, 2001. It called on the government to establish a national sex offender registry by January 30, 2002. The time has passed and nothing has been done. We have brought the motion back to see if we can again get unanimous support for it.

The solicitor general in his comments today indicated the government would not be supporting the motion. In March it was a great idea that needed to be done. Now the government says it will not support it and it does not need to be done. How can that be?

The government has put a few dollars into the existing system to expand it and make it better, but the people who use it say it is not good enough. They say the system does not do what is needed. They say we need to respond quickly to inquiries about sexual offenders and the present CPIC system does not do that.

Supply

Last March it was a good idea to create a system. The same people are now saying the system has always existed. Why is that? It is confusing. Why would government members vote to create something and then say we do not need to because it already exists? I am not sure what message that sends to Canadians. The message it sends to me is that the government does not know for sure what it needs to do.

When an idea comes forward from the opposition and is supported we celebrate. We celebrated the day it happened because we had put forward a motion and received unanimous consent. That does not happen often. It seems the tide has now turned and members of the government have been told to vote against us.

We need to debate the need for the registry to be comprehensive, up to date and, like any good system, accessible and speedy. The reason is that 44% of people abducted by sexual offenders are dead within the first hour, 74% are dead within three hours, and after a full day usually 91% are dead. That is a disturbing statistic. It is important that we can access the information and that it is thorough and quickly accessible. If not, it is worse than useless because we think we can rely on it but cannot.

The Canadian Police Association and the police chiefs have all said the \$2 million that was put into the CPIC upgrade is not adequate. They say more needs to be done.

● (1515)

For the life of me I cannot understand why a government that proclaims itself to be the protector of citizens and the rights of individuals would not want to do this. Why would the government not want to have in place the best system there could possibly be, especially to protect young people in Canada?

If we as politicians and leaders cannot act strongly to protect the children of our society, the ones who are most vulnerable, the ones who cannot protect themselves, then I am not sure why we are here. That should be paramount in any of our discussions. We have to act strongly, otherwise anything else we do will be for naught.

Ontario has put together a sex offender registry. Ontario felt that what was being done federally was not good enough so it has created its own. There are 5,000 names on it already. Over 90% of the offenders comply with provincial legislation. The province has them report annually and it knows where they are.

Another strange thing is that after the sentence is finished, and all sex offenders should serve full sentences, the sex offender can ask to be taken off the registry or for the sentence to be erased. That is done in the present system which brings in another fact. We know through research that 50% of child molesters reoffend within 10 to 30 years. For example, after serving a sentence of five years an offender's name is taken off the registry. Half of the people who have that done are still a threat to society. Why on earth would we want their names removed from the registry?

Ontario has a system in place. The province felt that the government was not moving quickly enough. My home province of Alberta is looking at ways to implement a system, as are British Columbia, Saskatchewan, P.E.I. and Nova Scotia. Even if these provinces individually go ahead, the whole issue will be on how to tie information together so it is quickly accessible by whichever area

of the country needs it. It may go even further than Canada. It could get into the systems used by the Americans and other police forces in the world.

Even if the provinces have their own registries and do a good job, the whole issue is how we ensure that they are connected, so that somebody in Saskatchewan who has a query can get the information on somebody who just came from another province. We do not see that happening.

I could go on at length about why the flip-flop in support, why the motion was supported last March and why it obviously will not be supported today. It will be interesting tonight when we stand to be counted in this place. I hope the members who change their vote from the last time will be accountable to somebody. I hope somebody will ask them why they have done that. I certainly would like to hear the answer.

I back up the claim by the Canadian Police Association and the police chiefs that what has been done to improve CPIC is not doing the job. The government has spent a half a billion dollars registering firearms. That the government will not consider spending a few dollars to create a system that will keep sexual predators at bay is beyond reason.

I commend the member for Langley—Abbotsford for bringing forward the motion and for the work that he does. I know he will continue to work to make the streets safer for the people of this country.

● (1520)

Mr. Keith Martin (Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca, Canadian Alliance): Madam Speaker, I am pleased to speak to this very important issue which affects Canadians from coast to coast.

If there is one important element in our justice system it has to be the protection of the health and welfare of innocent Canadians. Perhaps no other violation can compare to that of a sexual violation: rape, rape that is attached to incest, or rape within pedophilia. Those are the three categories we are talking about.

On March 13, 2001 the House passed a motion by my colleague which called for a national registry that would be in place by January 30 of this year. The motion was passed unanimously, yet the House has not seen that happen.

Should we have had to bring this motion to the floor of the House? No. The government was elected in 1993 and it has had over eight years to bring in a national sexual predator registry. I will deal with this issue at the end of my speech.

We are asking the government to live up to its commitment. We ask that it stand shoulder to shoulder with the police forces. We ask that it stand shoulder to shoulder with the victims. We ask that it do this for the women, the men and the children who have been sexually abused in their lives and also for those who I hope will not be sexually abused in the future because of laws the government will have brought in to protect innocent people.

Supply

In 1979, 7.1% of all people in our jails had been incarcerated for sexual offences. By 1989, a scant 10 years later, the number had increased to 44%, which is a substantial jump. The risk of reoffending is substantial with respect to the groups we are talking about. It is about 7% for those who commit rape, but the percentage is much higher for those who sexually abuse children.

Why the government has not implemented constructive solutions to protect the most vulnerable in our society is beyond the pale. I think it is beyond the comprehension of most members of the House.

We are asking for a commitment to be fulfilled, a promise that was made which must be kept. We want a national registry for sexual offenders as soon as possible. If the government were to bring forward legislation to that effect, I think there would be speedy passage of that bill by the House and the Senate.

I want to get into the specific issue of child sexual abuse. As a physician and as someone who has worked in a jail, I know this takes place and I have treated the victims. It is a pervasive, insidious, vile problem within our society. We have put forth the laws and rules of protection for children in our society.

With respect to sexual predation, it is critically important to have a system which invokes a very high penalty for that offence. We must also implement effective treatments for some people. The hallmarks of those treatments involve a range of holistic solutions, including education and skills training, social skills training, and the treatment of substance abuse problems.

However a substantial number of sexual offenders, particularly pedophiles, are not treatable. The government should adopt a sexual predator law, such as the law in the state of Washington. Its law defines individuals who are sexual predators who continue to victimize those who are the most vulnerable in our society. There is an incredible number. We have heard of many cases along those lines.

Our current laws are unable to deal with this problem. We plead with the government to institute a sexual predator law. Anybody who commits two separate sexual offences, one after the other, rape, a sexual offence involving a child, which includes pedophilia and incest, should be labelled a dangerous sexual offender.

• (1525)

That person would only be released if there were sufficient grounds to believe that the person simply will not reoffend. The Canadian public would be appalled to know that frequently pedophiles are released after they have "served their penalty". We have a moral obligation to Canadians to keep a person in jail if there are reasonable grounds to believe that the person will reoffend. If we cannot protect the children, who can we protect? It is incumbent upon us to do that.

Some would say it would violate the charter. Perhaps that argument could be made but I would argue that the charter protects the rights of individual law-abiding citizens. The charter expressly protects individuals from being violated in the manner which I have mentioned.

The law in Washington state has been challenged unsuccessfully in the courts. If the government were prepared to look at the sexual

predator law in Washington state and emulate that here in Canada, the law would be consistent with the charter. It would fulfill the obligation of the protection of rights, but most important, it would protect the rights of innocent people. In balancing the rights of innocent people with those of people who have committed criminal offences, clearly we must fall on the side of protecting the rights of innocent civilians.

Individuals who have been sexually abused should have the right to the offender's health information concerning HIV, hepatitis B, hepatitis C and the sexually transmitted diseases which the offender may or may not have. It should be the right of the victims to know the medical status of the person who has violated them.

The system must also ensure that the victim is aware of when and where a sexual abuser is being released. The secrecy that surrounds the release from prison of individuals who are sexual abusers, who are violent abusers, is beyond the pale. A victim who lives in fear for many years after the situation must have a right to know where the sexual violator is living. In the interests of fairness to the victim, the person who committed the offence should not be allowed to live in the same province or within 100 kilometres of the victim. They must not come in contact with each other. That is just an issue of fairness.

Getting to the reason the government has not brought in a sexual offender registry bill, innovation is a word the government does not understand. Innovation is something the government has been trying to avoid at all costs. Whether it is in the justice system, whether it is the sexual offender registry we are talking about today, whether it is economics or health care, the government has done everything in its power to pay heed to its polling results and how high it is in the polls. It appears to be more interested in having power for power's sake than using power for the public good.

As I said to the government last year, what is the point in having power if it is not used for the public good? What is the benefit of a 50% standing in the polls if the government is not prepared to use its mandate and its strength within the public for the public good?

What we have here is a relatively simple motion that protects Canadians. The government, at the very minimum, must act on this issue. It must also act on the wide variety of problems that affect Canadians, issues such as health care and access to health care; social program renewal; the head start program for children and prevention; economic competitiveness; education; sound fiscal and monetary policies; and the environment. The government knows the bill on endangered species is useless. Canadians care about these and many other pressing issues. They must be addressed.

I promise the House that my party, and I am sure all opposition parties, will continue to hold the government's feet to the fire. We must ensure that it does its job and implements solutions to the big problems Canadians care about.

Supply

• (1530)

Mr. Paul Szabo (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Works and Government Services, Lib.): Madam Speaker, is the hon. member aware of any other jurisdictions in which a national sex offender registry has been in place for a reasonable period of time? Is he aware of reports on the effectiveness and efficiency of systems which might be of use to legislators in Canada?

Mr. Keith Martin: Madam Speaker, Ontario and some of the other provinces have actually implemented registries. Part of the problem is one of competing jurisdictions. There is not a sharing of information.

The reason my colleague proposed it, and I think the House passed it, is that a national registry would actually facilitate the sharing of information to ensure that law enforcement officers across the country would have rapid access to pertinent information on an individual they are looking for or whom they have actually found.

That model could be used across the country. It is not difficult. The name, address, fingerprints and history of a person convicted of a sexual offence could be put into a computerized system. The database could be accessed by ministers of justice, attorneys general and police forces.

That is a bare bones system that would work very well from a national perspective. I hope the hon. member who has done a lot of work with children will convince his colleagues to support and implement this motion.

Mr. Paul Szabo: Madam Speaker, I know the hon. member has had children on his agenda as a parliamentarian for many years. I do not think there is a parliamentarian in this place who does not share the fundamental objective we are seeking.

However provincial bickering goes on with regard to many issues. The member might be aware of some of it. Would he advise the House of the attitudes of other jurisdictions, provinces or territories? Has he seen some disagreement among other jurisdictions with regard to the content or the administration of the database? Is there a substantive area of disagreement that would have to be rectified by a national registry?

• (1535)

Mr. Keith Martin: Madam Speaker, I do not see any conflicts within the current system or the proposal inherent within the national registry. We need to go to the experts and the experts are the police officers. The Canadian Police Association has given the government and the public a very eloquent document which describes in detail how a national registry would work and the elements of that registry.

I would only hope the member and other members go to the police association. Police officers across the country are very desirous of leadership at a national level to accomplish this objective.

If the Minister of Justice were able to sit down with her counterparts across the country and say we will develop a national registry and ask them to work with her, she would find a very open ear. Certainly our police forces would be very grateful for it and, most important, the Canadian public would be very grateful. Perhaps, if the minister did this, she would prevent some people from being sexually abused in the future.

Mr. Gerald Keddy (South Shore, PC/DR): Madam Speaker, my question for my colleague in the Alliance has been raised already today but I would like to hear his comments on it.

With the failure of the government to implement a national sex offender registry and the probable collapse of the gun registry that is already in existence, what would the hon. member think of the idea of using the ill fated registry with its systems, computers and personnel to track sex offenders instead of continuing with an ill thought out and ill fated gun registry of long guns owned by honest citizens?

It could be used to do two things: first, to register sex offenders and to track them and, second, as a DNA databank.

Mr. Keith Martin: Madam Speaker, for the benefit of the House let me indicate that a discussion paper was prepared by Health Canada and Justice Canada on child sex offenders information systems which explicitly describes how a sexual offender registry would work.

The member mentioned a very important issue. The government has been hell bent on producing a national registry for guns. It is a system, as many know, that will not work, will not protect people and is costing about \$500 million. If we took a fraction of that money and put it on the sharp edge of justice which would involve a national registry for sexual offenders, we would save people's lives. We would protect innocent civilians and do our job as legislators. That is something the Minister of Justice should take to task and implement right away.

Mr. Paul Szabo (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Works and Government Services, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I had the opportunity this morning to view a press conference by a government agency on the issue of child poverty. Members will know that this issue has seized this place long before we all came here. There has been a great deal of attention placed on the issue.

I know parliamentarians share the view that for children who live in poverty chances are that the cycle of poverty is very likely to occur in their adult lives as well. We in this place care about children.

We also have talked about child abuse many times in a broader sense than sexual abuse. We have talked about its impact on children. The House and the Senate went through the custody and access joint hearings which produced a wonderful report. I remember one of the provisions in the report was children who witness abuse among their parents were as affected as if they had been abused themselves. We have again demonstrated a sensitivity to the impacts on children.

This morning at this press conference and subsequently at an informal gathering with the representatives of the poverty coalition one of the things talked about was lone parent situations. We now have a situation where lone parents in Canada represent less than 15% of all families and yet account for some 52% of all children living in poverty.

Supply

Family issues start to come up here. It is a very linked situation. When we look at the fundamental stability of the Canadian family, when we look at the impacts on children when there is abuse in the home or when there are economic pressures, et cetera, children are usually the victims. We certainly saw that in the custody and access hearings.

Canadians should know that this place has a very large spot in its heart for children. Obviously we all win when our children grow up to be healthy, well adjusted young people with a sound set of moral, social and family values so that as they move forward in their lives they do not fall into problems, whether it be the cycle of violence, of welfare, of poverty or of other social ills.

The issue of a national sex offender registry is certainly one that we have discussed for some time. All members agree that in the discussion we had last March it was important for Canadians to know what was happening around the world, what was happening in Canada, and how we could take what we had and move it forward.

Parliamentarians in this place supported a motion to establish a national registry because we knew that the recidivism rate among offenders, among pedophiles and rapists, et cetera, was very high. It is very tragic that in society we have to be vigilant at all times for people who prey on children. It is disgusting and contemptible, but I am not sure whether or not as the previous speaker said that we should throw in jail anybody we identify as possibly doing something.

Our hearts are in the right place, but we have to understand that we have laws which have to be applied in accordance with the charter of rights and freedoms. They have to be applied in accordance with what is right. When people are sex offenders by nature or character, I do not think they were born like that. They are functions of their environment. They are functions of their family home, their relations with those with whom they grew up and the problems in that regard.

I agree with all members who spoke that we need to make a stronger commitment to addressing the serious problem of sex offenders and certainly repeat sex offenders.

• (1540)

Today we have a motion before the House pursuant to one we dealt with on March 13, 2001, which called for establishment of a sex offender registry by January 30, 2002, a date we have just passed.

I clearly understand, in view of the fact there is not a comprehensive, fully integrated national sex offender registry, why this issue would come up again. I applaud the opposition member for raising it with the House because it is reflective of the priorities and value system the House holds collectively.

The motion calls for the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights to prepare and bring forward a bill reflecting the spirit and intent of the motion with which we dealt last March.

I am not sure why we would take the whole process back to the committee to start again. It is a little confusing to me. I have no doubt the justice committee has the talent to draft a bill. Should that

be asked by the minister and referred to the committee for such a purpose, I have no doubt it could do it.

However I am not sure that is the most efficient way for parliamentarians in this place to move the file forward and to get our national registry in place in the fashion it should be to achieve its objectives.

It would be useful to review briefly some of the background to the whole question of protecting our children and what parliament and the government have done to reflect that priority. We obviously are committed to saving communities and preventing crime. Protection of our children is obviously an issue of great concern. That is why we now have a national sex offender registry. It is a registry of all convicted offenders and it is called CPIC.

Unfortunately I did not have an opportunity to speak to the issue last March, but as a member who shares concern about the protection and safety of children in our communities I want to be on record with regard to my shared concern. I ask the House to bear with me as I put forward some of this information, probably for the benefit of my constituents who are interested in my views as well.

The Canadian Police Information Centre is a computerized information system for Canadian law enforcement. It is operated by the RCMP. It serves over 60,000 law enforcement officials in every province and territory in Canada and handles over 100 million inquiries from 15,000 points of access.

When we consider the dimensions of the CPIC system clearly it is a national system. Clearly it is used by policing authorities across the country and by all jurisdictions with policing responsibilities.

The CPIC system contains millions of records on criminals, missing persons, vehicles, stolen property, registered firearms and crime scene information. It is a fairly comprehensive database. It is the primary tool used by our police enforcement officers to do work on crime scene information, to analyze criminal activities and to determine information that might be helpful in bringing resolution to a criminal act.

• (1545)

In 1994 the national screening system was created using CPIC. The national screening system allows agencies serving children to request local police background checks through CPIC. The background checks permit the agency to screen out potential volunteers known to be sexual abusers.

Even before we debated the creation of a national sex offender registry, there was a CPIC system which was accessible throughout communities across Canada for the purpose of screening volunteers and protecting our children. It was already used in a sense to provide a safer environment for our children.

Supply

Something I find very difficult to measure or to get information on is whether or not there is effectiveness in this. Some of my research has shown that other countries which have national sex offender registries have been unable to determine if they have prevented crimes that otherwise would have taken place. It is almost unmeasurable. It is more intuitive. I am not sure if I have heard today some evidence that these registries transfer the sort of crime prevention and protection that we seek to achieve.

Intuitively, it is the right thing to do. That is why parliamentarians supported the registry. It was important that it be there. The community thought it was something we needed. It is not a matter of having a silver bullet or that there is only one thing that we need to do to ensure we achieve the objective of full safety for our children and communities. That is not reasonable. Like most problems in society, this is complex. It means we need a multiplicity of solutions. A national registry is obviously one part of it.

I recall a line I have used throughout my parliamentary career. For every complex problem, there is a simple solution and it is wrong.

We are not looking for simple solutions. I think people who watch us on the television or watch from the gallery want to see us working in the best interests of Canadians, our children and communities. They want safe homes and safe streets. These are the themes and important areas which Canadians expect parliamentarians to address.

In April 1999 the solicitor general announced additional funding of \$115 million to renew and enhance CPIC. Even though CPIC is a substantially older vintage of database, it has been enhanced and continues to grow. We have done even more.

In September 2001 the solicitor general announced that the RCMP would spend an additional \$2 million on CPIC to improve its capacity to track sex offenders.

In March 2001 we first dealt with this motion. We did not wait for an unreasonable period of time to come up with some enhancements in CPIC to bring it up to the standard that members wanted to see. I do not think members are concerned whether CPIC or a national database is something we need. We do need a national sex offender registry.

The concern is whether it includes the kinds of information we need. Is it accessible to all who need to have it? Is it a tool that we can use to keep track of those sex offenders who have a high risk of reoffending?

An additional \$2 million was allotted to improve the system. We have also improved the ability of police to locate sex offenders quickly by enabling the database to be searched by a combination of address and offence. These are some of the things that are included in the Ontario model as well.

Protecting our children against sex offenders is ultimately our goal and we want to ensure we achieve that goal. In 2000 Bill C-7 amended the Criminal Records Act to ensure that the records of sex offenders who had been pardoned would be available for screening purposes. This was another important addition to the effectiveness of the existing database.

● (1550)

In 1997, new measures to deal with high risk offenders, including sex offenders, and to strengthen the sentencing and correction regime were introduced. A new long term offender designation targeted sex offenders and added a period of supervision of up to 10 years following the release from prison. Also amendments strengthened the dangerous offender provisions in the criminal code, including requiring judges to impose indeterminate sentences on all dangerous offenders and a new judicial restraint provision to permit controls to be applied to those at high risk of committing a serious personal injury offence.

It is clear that this is a multiplicity of measures to enhance the overall objective to improve the safety and security of our children and of Canadians from repeat offenders.

In June 2000 the DNA Identification Act came into effect. It established a DNA data bank to be maintained by the RCMP. With that data bank judges may order offenders convicted of designated criminal code offences to provide samples of bodily substances for DNA analysis with the resulting DNA profiles preserved in a convicted offenders index within the national DNA data bank. Again, this is another enhancement to the overall or comprehensive approach to dealing with the need to have the information necessary on a timely basis to address sex offenders.

Since March 13, 2001, the federal, provincial and territorial solicitors general and ministers of justice have met to discuss the issue of the sex offender registry on two occasions. They will be meeting again in eight days, on February 13 and 14. Senior federal, provincial and territorial teams have met on a number of occasions in preparation for this.

They are working on such things as a common understanding of the necessary components of a registry system, the principles and objectives of such a system, and the respective jurisdictional roles and responsibilities to deal with some of the legitimate concerns that the provinces and territories have with regard to ensuring that the objectives are met in their provinces.

While this work continues, the advice of the provincial and territorial jurisdictions has been received and CPIC enhancements are further underway. Now a distinct sub-database is to be created. Current addresses will be added and a five year history will be maintained. Registration information will be added. Other identifying information will be carried such as someone who has a tattoo. The database will be searched by address and offence.

As the previous speaker indicated, a number of jurisdictions within the provinces have existing systems. The current provisions within the CPIC system and the related databases already exceed the requests or the requirements of some of those jurisdictions. It is not as if the current system is somehow so deficient that we should go back to the justice committee and start from scratch.

We have a system in place. We have a commitment to that. I think all parliamentarians share the commitment that we need these tools to do the job. We made the commitment last March. We have reaffirmed that commitment by the initiatives we have taken over the months since the House adopted the motion. There should be no illusion whatsoever that there is a parliamentarian in this place who does not support the development, maintenance and upgrade of a national sex offender registry to ensure we have the tools needed to protect Canadians, especially our children.

● (1555)

[Translation]

Mr. Ghislain Lebel (Chambly, BQ): Madam Speaker, I listened with great interest to my colleague on this issue presented before us today. He explained at great length the famous CPIC, the registry used exclusively by the police in Canada.

I believe that what the Canadian Alliance is introducing today is something that goes further than this. What the member referred to was the power to investigate, to dig, to search in a registry in a given sector, when a sexual offence has been perpetrated against a child. Is there a file on the individual? That is what the CPIC can tell us.

What the Canadian Alliance members are calling for is a national file that could be transmitted, and that could be consulted if there were a hunch or a worry. For example, this new neighbour, does he have this type of history? That is what the Canadian Alliance is proposing.

Naturally, party rules are such that sometimes, when one does not want to be caught out, as is often the case with the Liberals, our friends opposite, one has to call out the troops to defend the indefensible, to support the unsupportable, to do anything and everything to stop any challenges or concern from the opposition. That is the role that the previous speaker played, in a great way.

I would ask him to think first, not about the crime that was committed, but instead of the crime that will be committed, not in an attempt to make reparation, but in an attempt to prevent. This is the context of the Canadian Alliance motion.

This is not the first time that we have heard such comments from this member who has a solution for everything, and the only one, and the right one. What does he think about preventing sexual crimes involving children? That is my question.

● (1600)

[English]

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Bakopanos): Before I give the hon. member the floor, I would like to remind hon. members that cell phones are not allowed in the House. If you have a cell phone, please turn it off or take it outside.

Mr. Paul Szabo: Madam Speaker, I appreciate the member's question. It is certainly a very interesting one.

First, I would say that we have officials of the RCMP and other law enforcement agencies working together with their counterparts in the provinces and territories and they are the experts Canadians rely upon to protect and defend us from exactly what the member is saying. Although I am flattered that the member thinks I have all the

Supply

right answers to all the issues, I wish that were so but it is not and I admit that.

However, when we talk about the issue of preventing a crime from happening in the first place it smacks of the same debate we have about immigration. People ask "Why do you let those criminals in?" They came into the country, they committed crimes and people ask why they were let in. I do not know what criminals look like when they come into the country. They do not have signs on them stating they are criminals. They may not be criminals when they come into Canada.

The member wants to argue that criminals can be profiled. We deal with this on the transport committee when we deal with airport and airline safety and we talk about profiling, but profiling by racial or other means will not be an effective way. It is a tool that we will be able to use, but again, there is no simple solution. I do not propose or suggest that there is a single way in which we can prevent this. We cannot guarantee prevention. The United States could not prevent September 11. It spends \$10 billion a year on security and intelligence, et cetera, yet a horrific event took place involving people who had been legally in the United States for years. Not even their family members knew.

The member says we need a solution and that what they are proposing is the solution that would allow us to prevent crime. We certainly have the registry in place that lists people who have committed crimes. They may now be finished serving their sentences; we know they have a high recidivism rate and we can track them. That is our tool that lets us know about all the people who have committed crimes.

I think what the member was asking me was how we prevent someone who has not committed a sex crime yet from ever committing it. I just do not have the answer to that. I just do not know how a criminal can be profiled except on the basis of demographics or things like relationships with same or similar patterns. We have scientists to do that, but I am not sure whether I have heard anyone here articulate how someone's first crime can be prevented.

● (1605)

Mrs. Carol Skelton (Saskatoon—Rosetown—Biggar, Canadian Alliance): Madam Speaker, I would like to ask a question of the hon. member. He talked about the CPIC system, what it is and how effective it is. The searchable criteria on that system are name, address, offence and age. The Ontario system has 18 searchable criteria. They include: build; facial hair; facial hair colour; hair colour; hair style and length; eye colour; police jurisdiction; race; scar description, length and type; skin colour; tattoo location and class; height and weight; and a recent photograph. This information is updated annually.

I understand that the federal government could have this system immediately at no cost. I would like to ask the member why he would not look at a system like this, which would help protect our children, and put it in place.

Supply

Mr. Paul Szabo: Madam Speaker, that is a very good question. Being a resident of the province of Ontario, I am aware of Ontario's system. I am also aware that this system has not been in place for very long. Quite frankly it is something that was developed very recently.

Yes, within the province of Ontario there are the resources to be able to do all of the things the member said, but having said that, let me say that the federal government currently is meeting with its provincial and territorial counterparts and is looking at these things.

Clearly the more criteria and data we have, the better we will be able to hone in on things. I would think that this would be a shared objective. There is no indication whatsoever that the Government of Canada has any interest in not making this the best possible sex offender registry we could have to ensure that we have the best chance of meeting our targets.

I thank the member for putting forward a list of various criteria. I am not an expert but I certainly do know that the principal elements within the CPIC system, which have been developed for well over a decade, are the principal criteria. They are in place and have been used very successfully in addressing some of the policing requirements, but we can go further and I will grant the member that. We can go further and I think the government supports that. That is why over the past four years more than \$3.5 million, I believe, has been invested to continue to update that CPIC system.

Mrs. Carol Skelton: Madam Speaker, I would like to ask the hon. member how many police officers he has spoken to and how many parents who have lost children he has spoken to.

Mr. Paul Szabo: Madam Speaker, I would have no way of knowing that. As someone who has been involved in my community, as have most members here who admittedly have extensive community service records, I know that I meet with people in the crime prevention bureau. Many of the volunteers are there simply because they have had incidents, but they do not go around wearing them on their sleeves. They do not say we have to do this and that because of their children. They are there for the right reasons. They want to help and to have that input.

It is an interesting question, but the more important question is whether I feel that Canadians who are interested in this issue have taken the opportunity to influence members of parliament and enforcement agencies, et cetera, to do a better job. I am sure they have.

Mrs. Lynne Yelich (Blackstrap, Canadian Alliance): Madam Speaker, I will be sharing my time with the member for Saskatoon—Rosetown—Biggar.

Today I rise to speak on the very important issue of the need for an efficient and effective national sex offender registry. I approach this issue from two perspectives, the first as a member of parliament and the second as a parent whose love for my children supersedes all other emotions and often helps dictate the kind of Canada I want to be a part of. I, like most parents, work to protect my children from danger. It is our responsibility as parents to do this for our children. This is the concept in a family dynamic, but today we extend this concept to our communities.

The Canadian Alliance is proposing that a more effective national sex offender registry would lessen the impact of danger on our children's lives. The crimes of pedophiles involve our most innocent citizens, our children. There should be no hesitation by members of the House in taking swift steps to develop a more effective national sex offender registry.

Let us examine the current registry, the Canadian Police Information Centre. It is an advanced computerized information storage and retrieval facility that provides tactical information on crimes and criminals. It is the only national information sharing system linking criminal justice and law enforcement officers.

It has four searchable criteria: name, address, offence and age. This is in comparison to the Ontario sex offender registry, which has 18 searchable criteria and is updated far more regularly than the CPIC currently in use. Included in Ontario's sex registry are a photograph and many descriptives like scars and tattoos. This is valuable information when looking for and identifying suspects. Why is the national registry missing such pertinent information?

I was informed by a constituent in my riding that when an individual is removed from public premises for suspicious behaviour displayed toward children, a description of the individual is often e-mailed to other public facilities to create awareness of a potentially dangerous situation. A description may sound something like this: a 51 year old man of average height, slightly overweight, with grey hair, and beginning to bald. I ask how many people sitting here today would fit that description. Would we screen all people fitting the description? On the side of safety, one would have to, but then we have to add that precious element of time.

When a child is abducted, time is of the essence. One does not have time to stop every individual who fits a general description. Police need searchable, relevant and applicable data on a national level. We have yet to provide that for them. Statistics for kidnappings that result in murder show that 44% of victims were dead within one hour, 74% were dead within three hours and 91% were dead within 24 hours. We can imagine the parents of these children as the hours pass by and law enforcement officers are forced to work with an inadequate system.

I refer now to a community in my riding, the community of Clavet. That community has had to deal with the stress and fear of discovering a neighbour who is a convicted sex offender. The man was originally sentenced to two years less a day and three years' probation for three counts of sexual assault. Upon release he moved to and resided in the town of Clavet, just minutes from a local school.

A lot of study has been done on pedophiles, their habits, their reasons for offending and their potential to reoffend. The results of these studies are not very reassuring. It has been shown that 50% of child molesters reoffend 10 to 30 years after sentencing. The community of Clavet did not have to wait that long. The man was eventually charged again for breaking an order to stay away from children. As well, he pleaded guilty to child pornography and weapons charges.

Supply

●(1610)

When I go to Clavet and my constituents ask what is being done to protect them and their children, should I expect them to be satisfied that this man's name, offence, age and address will be logged onto a system that may occasionally be updated?

I would not be very satisfied receiving that answer and I am not satisfied giving that answer. Therefore I ask that the government come through on its promise to provide an effective national sex offender registry.

As a parent, I would welcome a system that would ensure that when a heinous sex crime has been committed against children, identifying the perpetrators would be an immediate process. This would allow officials to eliminate or continue investigating the said suspect.

I said earlier that time was of the essence. I now repeat this phrase while considering our work as parliamentarians. The deadline for a new or improved registry was January 30, 2002. The deadline has passed. The dragging of feet through this legislation is unacceptable. We owe our children more than that. We owe law enforcement officers more than that.

The registry would be a tool to aid law enforcement officers to protect our children. My children and my constituents' children deserve this protection.

I have spoken at great length today about how having my own children motivates me in this cause. I now want to tell the real story of one child's pain that led to the creation of the Ontario sex offender registry, Christopher's law.

Christopher's law is the legislation behind the registry created in the memory of a child who was sexually assaulted and murdered. The number one recommendation of the jury presiding over the inquest into Christopher's death was the enactment of the dangerous sexual predator law. It gained strong national support throughout Canada.

The following is the way Linda Slobodian, of the *Calgary Herald*, explained the background:

Every night, Jim Stephenson and his wife Anna tucked their children, Christopher and Amanda, into bed and said, "Good night, luv ya."

"You'd get, 'Yeah,' then they'd go off to sleep," says Stephenson.

In 1988, the Thursday before Father's Day, Stephenson approached Christopher's bed.

"He looked up and said, 'I love you, Dad.' My reaction to that was 'Good! He didn't have to wait for me to tell him that. So now we can move our relationship to another level.' That was the last thing he ever said to me."

The next evening, Anna and the kids went to the mall. They were on their way to the mall doors to leave, when Anna and Amanda, 8, went into a shop.

They were being stalked by Joseph Fredericks, a pedophile who arrived in Brampton three weeks earlier. He was on automatic parole afforded criminals who serve two-thirds of a sentence. Had there been a registry, police would have known where he was.

The shop was small. Anna told Christopher to stand outside, precious few feet from her, with the parcels.

The courts later heard Fredericks came up behind Christopher, put a knife to his throat and said, "Pick up the bags, come with me or I'll kill you."

"You think you streetproof children, not to accept invitations for rides, but you never expect they'll be faced with that situation," says Stephenson.

Anna looked up, didn't see Christopher and knew something was wrong. It wasn't like him to walk away.

A lady at the barber shop said Christopher just went by with a man.

Security sealed the doors. Police arrived within minutes. Fredericks was sexually assaulting Christopher across the street in a vacant field about 100 metres from the police station.

He then forced Christopher back to a basement apartment and repeatedly assaulted him over the course of the Friday evening and into the Saturday.

"Saturday night after it was dark, he was administered some sleeping pills. His hands were tied and he was forced out of the apartment across the street into another vacant field.

I will fast forward to finish.

Fredericks told them where where the body could be found. Stephenson identified him on Father's Day.

In the Stephensons' kitchen hangs a framed print. It is a scenic picture Christopher drew for Father's Day.

"There is a stream in it and a pond and three mountains.... At the cemetery where Christopher rests, there's a monument with three piers to it. And the cemetery has a pond. Curious. You wonder..." says Stephenson softly.

●(1615)

A national registry would not have prevented Christopher's assault but it could have saved his life. I beg the members of the House to put power behind our words and create a registry equal to one created in Christopher's memory before we have to name our national registration after another child.

Mr. Paul Szabo (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Works and Government Services, Lib.): Madam Speaker, the member provided a fair bit of information and obviously has done some research on the issue. I appreciate the statistics. I think it is important to have them on the floor so that members can appreciate the parameters in which we work.

The hon. member used the kidnapping of children as one of her examples. How many of those kidnapping situations involved one of the parents or guardians?

●(1620)

Mrs. Lynne Yelich: Madam Speaker, I do not know how many kidnappings involved parents. I am assuming and only hope that parents would never have been involved in such an incident.

Mrs. Bev Desjarlais (Churchill, NDP): Madam Speaker, just to follow on that, although it is not my question, all one has to do is read the child find posters to know that in a good many instances parents are involved in a kidnapping process and it is usually the non-custodial parent. It happens in far too many instances and traumatizes a good number of children.

My question for the hon. member relates to the motion put forward today. We have heard comments today from members in the House and from my friend across the way which have indicated that there probably is not a member in the House who does not think there should be a registry. There is an acceptance that probably everyone thinks there should be a registry. It is the specifics as to how the registry will operate that come into question.

Supply

With regard to the motion, what has come into question, quite frankly, is the procedural issue. I hope Canadians will understand that a good many parliamentarians will probably not support the motion because of the procedural irregularity.

I see the motion as being somewhat despicable. I think it is despicable to exploit this type of motion by adding that if the issue of a registry comes up in any private member's bill it will become votable. This is where we get into the procedural issue. If a private member introduces a bill in the House of Commons that relates to the registry then the bill becomes votable. Somehow that private member's bill becomes the issue, not the content of what we are dealing with.

In essence, what has happened with this motion, which members I am sure would all vote for if it did not have this despicable, exploitive procedure, irregularity, is that it will probably be used by a number of Alliance members to make other members of the House look bad because they did not support it, when the bottom line for the Alliance and for the member involved is that it is exploiting the issue. Quite frankly, that is not acceptable.

It is important for us to acknowledge that there should be a registry. I am disappointed that the government has not moved forward a lot quicker and that the resources have not been made available to have a registry that will do the job. However the motion by the Alliance is an exploitive motion.

Mrs. Lynne Yelich: Madam Speaker, I am a little confused. I would think the way the hon. member spoke that she probably would vote for it then. It sounds like she agrees that it is a very good motion.

We certainly are not exploiting. When I read that story I found it a very sad story. I do not think I was exploiting the story at all.

Stories like the one I told can be very helpful to the Canadian Police Association in very many circumstances. Does the member know how the people in Clavet found out there was somebody in their riding who had been a serious sex offender? They found out through the *StarPhoenix*, our Saskatoon newspaper. They did not know the man was dangerous. He was in the community which is a small community with very trusting people.

I am very surprised and insulted that the member would even suggest that we were exploiting it.

Mr. Paul Szabo: Madam Speaker, the member should understand that the exploitation is the private member's bill adjustment. It means that any private member's bill dealing with the database must automatically be votable. It violates all the rules we have for private member's business. It could be a lousy bill but it would automatically be votable. The exploitation is the procedure.

• (1625)

Mrs. Carol Skelton (Saskatoon—Rosetown—Biggar, Canadian Alliance): Madam Speaker, I am pleased to rise today to speak to the Canadian Alliance supply day motion. The motion is in response to the government failing to establish a national sex offender registry.

In a motion adopted by the House in March 2001, the deadline for the introduction of the registry was January 30. That day has now passed with no action on the part of the government.

Canada is quickly becoming a haven for sex offenders. A B.C. court ruled that child pornography was okay. The logic behind that decision eludes me. How can it be okay for our children to be violated in such a manner? How is it okay to allow adults to use, abuse and endanger our children?

It was the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights that put forward the motion for the registry. How is justice served by ignoring the recommendations of the committee? How is justice served by allowing our children to face horrific circumstances perpetrated by adults? How are the human rights of our children being protected by ignoring their plight?

Unwilling to wait for the federal government to do something about the safety of children, the Ontario government initiated its own updated and more advanced sex offender registry. This is surely a source of comfort for the parents in that province. I applaud the Ontario government for its forethought and action in this matter.

Why does the federal government continue to drag its feet on this matter? Are the children in other parts of the country not important? Does it believe that if it ignores the issue the rest of the provinces will follow Ontario's lead and initiate their own registries?

Is it not the responsibility of the government to look after the welfare of all children in Canada? Once sex offenders move out of Ontario, tracking them is left to the Canadian Police Information Centre, or CPIC, a system that is not effective. A national registry is needed in order to track the whereabouts of these offenders.

The solicitor general touts the performance of the CPIC system as being all that Canadians need. That system cannot provide jurisdictional searches, radius searches or searches by physical descriptors. It also does not have the ability to include photographs.

Also lacking in the current system is the legislation necessary to force offenders to register and keep their information current. Pedophiles are given great opportunities to abuse our children in Canada. They are legally allowed to engage in sexual activity with a consenting 14 year old. The sexual age of consent in Canada is 14 years of age. Fourteen year old children—and at 14 they are just children—are legally allowed to make crucial decisions concerning their sexual activities. Children of that age possess neither the maturity nor the life experience to make such critical decisions.

The former minister of justice was approached in connection to raising the age of sexual consent. It currently stands at 14 years of age. The government has refused to act to protect our children.

It is a pedophile's dream to be in a country that legally allows sexual activity with children as young as 14. Due to their lack of maturity and experience, these children are easy prey. It is much easier to induce and persuade them to commit acts that are not in their best interests than it would be with a person who is older.

Parents are helpless against these persuasions and inducements. Police associations and family and social agencies agree that the age of consent must be raised. Parents who are actively trying to get their children off the streets and away from pedophiles, pimps and others are offered no help from the justice system. If the child is 14, he or she is allowed to make these decisions. Law enforcement agencies and other departments are unable to help the parents save their children.

A 14 year old is entitled under the laws of Canada to make these unhealthy decisions. A 40 year old man is legally allowed to live with a 14 year old girl. Parents and law enforcement and social agencies are helpless to intervene. While the age of consent is 14, pedophiles and other deviants are able to legally engage in sexual activity with our children.

• (1630)

Early sexual activity in children often leads to increased promiscuity, teenage pregnancy, higher rates of sexually transmitted disease, a tendency to drop out of school, and an increased chance of deviant behaviour later in life. There is a marked increase in the rate of HIV infection among young heterosexual girls in our country.

Early sexual activity and abuse inflicted by older partners leads to increased emotional and social problems in children. Our children should be given every opportunity to have happy, healthy, normal lives. It is not sufficient to have band aid solutions to the problem. We put money into programs to keep kids in school and numerous other social programs. Why do we not give kids a chance by fixing a law that has their best interests in mind?

The attempt to protect our children by way of Bill C-15 as it pertains to the luring of children over the Internet is a start. However with the current age of sexual consent at 14 the new law would only apply to children 13 years of age and younger.

An entire age group of children is being ignored in Canada. At 18 one is an adult and, in the majority of cases, fully capable of making serious decisions about one's actions and future. Those 13 years of age and younger are protected under the law. However the age group of 14 to 17 is offered no protection. This is sending a dangerous message to pedophiles and deviants. I am disgusted to think our country has become a destination of choice for men and women who seek out younger children.

While the government continues to ignore the plight of children 14 years of age and older it is also doing a great disservice to those who are 13 and younger. While these children are protected from pedophiles and abusers under the law they are not fully protected due to limitations on law enforcement agencies to adequately track the movement of pedophiles. Law enforcement agencies are limited due to the government's inaction in implementing an effective sex offender registry.

It has been said time and again that children are our future. We in our party believe that. However the government seems comfortable in the knowledge that it is depriving many of our children from having a future. Children are forced into sexual slavery every day by child molesters, pedophiles and pimps. They are legally allowed to do so under Canadian law at the moment.

Supply

Our children deserve the best protection we are able to provide. By doing nothing we send a message that they are not important. The government must act immediately to implement a working, viable sex offender registry. Let us give our children the future they deserve.

Mr. Gary Lunn (Saanich—Gulf Islands, Canadian Alliance): Madam Speaker, one of the members from the NDP got up and made a point about exploiting the issue. A member across the way got up and talked about a procedural or technical matter.

I will go to the heart of this as it is all part of the debate. Does the hon. member think the Canadian people care one iota about what is votable, what is not votable or what is a technical point? Perhaps we should leave the technical issues to the experts because the Canadian people want us to show leadership and move legislation to establish a database that does the job they are counting on it to do.

Does the hon. member think Canadians care about the technical points the other members are raising or do they want to see us get the job done?

Mrs. Carol Skelton: Madam Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague from Saanich—Gulf Islands for his eloquent question.

I believe Canadians want us to support our families and children. I agree totally with him. What I have heard from my constituents is that they want us to put laws and systems in place that protect children totally so they are safe and not preyed on. We must do this.

I have a son in law who is a police officer. My oldest granddaughter is 13 years old. On the weekend she sat on my knee, cuddled me and told me she loved me. She is a little girl. It breaks my heart to think about little children being abused because the government will not go forward and put a system in place that can be used effectively to catch these people.

• (1635)

Mr. Bob Speller (Haldimand—Norfolk—Brant, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I listened closely to the hon. member's comments. As a member of parliament who has been championing the issue for some time, well before the hon. member was elected, I want to reassure her. After we came into government in 1993 I and a number of members of caucus pushed legislation for the government to move forward on the issue.

As slow as it has been, we have seen governments at all levels recognize the significant problem of sexual offenders in Canada and the problems local police and law enforcement officers have in terms of tracking them down and making sure they are known in their communities.

Supply

I have had many meetings with our solicitor general. I can assure the hon. member he is truthful and honest and wants to move forward as quickly as possible on the issue. The hon. minister will be meeting with his counterparts from the provinces over the next couple of weeks to narrow down many of the issues and move forward on them. It has been difficult because of jurisdictional problems, as he has said.

A number of the issues the hon. member and colleagues around the House have brought up today will be addressed in the next few weeks at the meetings. From what we are told, legislation will probably come forward later in the year so we can have a national approach to the problem.

I know the hon. member is sincere when she says the government and all governments across the country need to move forward and do something about this serious problem. I have been given assurances by the minister, and I take him at his word, that we will see the changes the hon. member has requested in the very near future. I am pleased with the minister for giving us those assurances.

Mrs. Carol Skelton: Madam Speaker, I thank the hon. member. I will be watching closely.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Bakopanos): It is my duty pursuant to Standing Order 38 to inform the House that the question to be raised tonight at the time of adjournment is: the hon. member for Burnaby—Douglas, Foreign Affairs.

Mr. Gary Lunn (Saanich—Gulf Islands, Canadian Alliance): Madam Speaker, I will be splitting my time with the hon. member for Surrey Central.

I am pleased to rise today to address the opposition motion put forward by the hon. member for Langley—Abbotsford.

Neither I nor any of my colleagues and friends on the other side of the House believe the government wants to put children at risk. All parties in the House seek to protect society from sexual predators. To suggest otherwise would be inappropriate and unparliamentary. However it is also inappropriate for the government to ignore the will of the House and be wilfully blind to a proposal that would save so many lives at such little cost.

Accordingly I ask the government to examine its record on the file since the House passed a motion on March 13, 2001. Ten months have passed with no action. The registry should have been completed.

I will get to the heart of the issue. I applaud the hon. member for Haldimand—Norfolk—Brant for his efforts on the file. However we can only go by what we hear from the solicitor general who has the almighty power. He has informed the House the government will deal with the issue by adding an address field to CPIC. Adding another field to CPIC will not do. It is no good if the field is empty. We need comprehensive legislation to ensure experts have the tools to develop the system, and we should leave the technicalities to the experts.

The system must be enforceable and mandatory so when sexual predators are released from institutions it is compulsory that they report their whereabouts. There must be provisions that law enforcement agencies can enforce. That is what we are asking for.

We are trying to protect the most vulnerable in society: our children. I could read lists and lists of missing children. The lists keep going on and on. It is not okay that we are not acting.

I will cite a transcript of a *CTV News* report for March 13, 2001. The reporter was Lisa LaFlamme. She said the motion of the hon. member for Langley—Abbotsford had:

—generated a rare show of political unity. The unanimous support for national sex offender registry even surprised him... Trouble is, it doesn't keep track of sex offenders if they move. The Liberals say they will simply expand that existing database to include the updated addresses so police will know where to start looking—

The then solicitor general confirmed the government was talking about adding an address field. There was nothing to suggest it would be mandatory that offenders report. There were no enforcement mechanisms for our police officers. That is what needs to happen.

We heard the hon. member for Blackstrap give an eloquent speech that went right to our hearts and turned us inside out. We have the ability to act but unfortunately nothing has happened to date.

In the interim provinces are starting to take their own action, as we are aware. The province of Ontario has moved on the issue. My own province of British Columbia plans to move with a sex offender registry. Ontario has spent almost \$1 million to develop its registry. It has offered to share it with the federal government in the interest of the country.

• (1640)

On March 20 the then solicitor general stated:

What I have said over the last few days is that the government will not spend dollars just to duplicate a system already in place.

The government keeps making the argument that it voted in favour of something it already has. Yes, we have CPIC but that is not what this is about. I leave it up to the experts. I know some people are arguing for a new registry and I understand that. Some people say the government just wants to add an address field, but it needs much more than that. There are experts out there that can ensure this happens.

At the end of the day we need to ensure that as long as sexual predators are preying on our most vulnerable in society we give our children every available protection that we can. I would argue that sexual predators have a disease. The reoffence rate of child molesters after serving sentences is over 50%. That is not good enough.

Some people will argue about the rights of the offenders under the charter stating that they have served their time. They will ask whether we have the right to track these people and whether we have the right to make this information available to law enforcement agencies. Yes, we do. The cost to society is far greater than the cost to the individual. You know, Madam Speaker, being a lawyer yourself that it would be saved by section one.

We must infringe on the individual's rights. If people commit these acts they forfeit those rights. The danger is so great even after they serve their time. Our most vulnerable in society are put at such a high risk if these offenders are around. There are hundreds of documented cases to support that.

Supply

It is incumbent upon us to ensure that we provide a system that is mandatory, that tracks all the required data, from their addresses to who they are, their hair colour, and all of that other information. We must give our enforcement agencies the teeth they need to ensure that this is happening and they can enforce it. That is all we are asking.

The frustrating part is that politics gets in the way. The government looks at this and says that it can spin this. It has CPIC. It will add an address field and then it can vote in favour of the motion. That does not go to the intent of the motion. The majority of members on the other side would also want to protect children in this way. It is important that we act.

We have a firearms registry and there are all kinds of numbers out there, but everyone will agree that they are awfully high numbers. Something in the range of \$660 million has been spent on the firearms registry. It would cost a mere pittance of that to put this registry together. It could be something that dovetails on CPIC. There are experts that can do this. We do not need to get caught up in those kinds of details.

We need to focus on what we are trying to achieve. We must agree on what we want the end product to be. We have to listen to the experts in the field, the Canadian Police Association and law enforcement agencies who will be using it. They are crying out for this. We have an opportunity in the House to step out of a partisan nature and show that we will support this.

I encourage the government to listen to the stories that have been told in the House today. I could read the list of missing children but I do not have that much time. I ask members from all parties to leave politics and partisanship aside and do what is right for our children.

Members should not buy into the idea that adding an address field will solve the problem. We all know it will not. What happens after an offender has been released from a penitentiary? There is an address. Do members think that person will be there a week or a month later? Of course not. The reoffence rate is at 50%. Let us allow officials to put some teeth into a system that will work and will protect our most vulnerable in society, our children.

• (1645)

Mrs. Bev Desjarlais (Churchill, NDP): Madam Speaker, my colleague who just spoke questioned whether or not Canadians are interested in procedural technicalities. Maybe they are not necessarily interested in all procedural technicalities, but I would comment that they would be interested to know that should the official opposition decide to amend its motion and take out that procedural technicality it would probably have the support of the entire House of Commons for the motion.

If my colleague does not think procedural technicalities are important, I suggest that he remove that procedural technicality that he knows will not be supported by a number of members. It would then certainly have the support of a good number in the House.

Mr. Gary Lunn: Madam Speaker, my point is, is there a technicality there to debate? The motion clearly states what we are passing. We are getting into debate here. We should not be having a debate about technicalities. Obviously we have to get it right and there are experts in the field who can do that.

By passing this motion we turn it over to the experts to ensure that we would get a registry that would protect our children. Nowhere in the motion are we trying to pretend we are the experts on how to do that. We are trying to get the experts to do that. I would argue that is the very example that politics are interfering. It is unfortunate we cannot leave that outside and go to the heart of the motion and support it, so that we can protect our most vulnerable in society, our children.

• (1650)

Mrs. Bev Desjarlais: Madam Speaker, if politics are not to be involved in this why on earth, with a motion of this importance and magnitude, would the opposition add on a paragraph stating:

That when a Private Member, in proposing a motion for first reading of a bill, states that the bill is in response to the recommendations contained in a report pursuant to this Order, the second reading and subsequent stages of the bill shall be considered under Private Members' Business and the bill shall be placed immediately in the order of precedence for Private Members' Business as a votable item

Knowing that there might be private members who have bills aligned to this, this is done purely for purposes that are unnecessary in relation to the sex offender registry.

I must say that if we want to talk politics it is the official opposition that is playing politics with this serious issue. I suggest that it not play politics with this issue. Canadians are no longer fooled by the actions of the members of the Canadian Alliance. They see them for who they are and they will continue to see them for who they are. These type of motions will only enforce it.

Mr. Gary Lunn: Madam Speaker, the member for Churchill has questioned the procedural acceptability of the motion with respect to the mechanism to carry the bill through the House. She has talked about this point a number of times.

This procedure is almost an exact rewrite of Standing Order 68(4). It has been repeated in our motion because Standing Order 68(4) establishes a mechanism for government motions and private members' motions. Since we are dealing with a supply motion the procedure had to be included in our motion. It is procedurally acceptable. This is the same procedure used that brought in the impaired driving bills adopted last spring.

I do not know if members have private members' bills or what she is trying to argue. Who cares whose bill it is. Let us pass the motion. It is almost word for word from the standing orders. Let us leave the silliness and politics out of it and let us try to do something that is right for Canadians. I cannot emphasize enough that this is about the most vulnerable in our society, our children. If there is one issue that we can put everything else behind us, this is the one. Let us forget the politics, what party we belong to, whose agenda it is, and who is getting the credit. Let us leave it alone.

This is procedurally correct. NDP members have been ranting on this all day and they cannot get it through their heads. They should read the standing orders. It is virtually word for word Standing Order 68(4), unless the hon. member is challenging it as well.

Supply

Mr. Gurmant Grewal (Surrey Central, Canadian Alliance): Madam Speaker, I am pleased to rise on behalf of the constituents of Surrey Central to participate in the debate on the need for a national sex offender registry.

I would like members to think back to March 13, 2001. On that day all members that were present in the House, including our Liberal colleagues, voted in favour of a motion proposed by my Canadian Alliance colleague from Langley—Abbotsford.

I was somewhat skeptical of the government's motive at the time. After all, back then government members stood up in this Chamber to say that they valued the lives of women and children above everything else. They highlighted the need for a sex offender registry. They ignored a mass of information regarding the ineffectiveness of CPIC, the Canadian Police Information Centre, in identifying and tracking dangerous sex offenders in the community.

Instead the government chose to turn the sex offender issue into a political football. The government voted for it because it would not have been politically smart to vote against it. It chose to put politics above the public interest, even in such an important area. It chose to lecture Canadians about why they did not need to have a national sex offender registry today.

During the last federal election in my constituency of Surrey Central, I recall the three time defeated Liberal candidate, whom I will not name because it is not about him, it is about the issue, advocating that if elected he would create a national sex offender registry.

Does anyone know how? He said he would introduce a private member's bill. That Liberal candidate had already been told, probably before the election, that a new Liberal government would not create a national sex offender registry. That is why he resorted to a private member's bill.

The Prime Minister admitted that parents have the right to be concerned and he virtually confessed to the Liberal candidate in Surrey Central, who was defeated by the way, that he could not stop him from trying to create a registry through a private member's bill. That shows that the government lacks the political will to implement the national sex offender registry that was passed in the House in March of last year.

The Canadian Police Association declared that CPIC, which the government touts very much, was not up to the task of tracking dangerous sex offenders. When the government said that CPIC was as good as a national sex offender registry, it forgot that provincial governments and victims rights groups joined the CPA in saying that CPIC fell far short of what was needed to keep Canadians particularly those who are most vulnerable, our children safe from sexual predators.

The government must be ignorant of the fact that time is the key ingredient in saving the lives of children abducted by sexual predators or pedophiles. Of the victims who are murdered by these criminals, 91% are killed within 24 hours of their abduction. Some of the figures indicate that over 44% of children are killed within just the first hour. That is astonishing.

Another astonishing fact is that 75% of the offenders historically live within a few kilometres of the area where the crime is committed. Therefore, it is vitally important to have an effective tool that helps to quickly identify all sexual offenders living within a geographical region.

• (1655)

By not including vital information such as addresses and a requirement that changes of address be reported, CPIC is not conclusive. It is not comprehensive. It is not time sensitive since law enforcement officials will be forced to begin investigations of such disappearances from scratch instead of assembling short lists of suspects residing in the particular area where the crime is committed.

Even with \$2 million in upgrades which would allow CPIC to include information regarding the addresses of criminals, provincial governments from coast to coast, from Charlottetown to Victoria, have expressed serious doubts about whether the national police database is up to the job of tracking dangerous sex offenders.

The weak and arrogant federal Liberals have shown a total unwillingness to work with the provinces in many areas including health care, education, regulatory reform and now the national sex offender registry. In each of these areas they have shown a confrontational approach rather than a co-operative approach and a total lack of neglect to co-operate with the provinces and municipalities, in this case setting a national example for provinces and municipalities of co-ordination of their efforts in standardization.

The government is part of the problem, not part of the solution. For example, the federal government still allows sex offenders to apply for a pardon after five years. This would effectively remove them from any provincial or federal sex offenders database. It does this in spite of the fact that 50% of sex offenders, more than half, are known to be at high risk of reoffending even 10 to 30 years after their initial conviction.

Another way the feds are working against the provinces is that they do not make offenders register with the provincial database. When a provincial jurisdiction requests federal authorities to pass on notice of criminals who are released from prison which they have to register, they are reluctant to do that as in the case of Ontario, for instance.

Not only do the feds put Canadian children at risk by not taking action on a national sex offenders database. Their inaction undermines the efforts of jurisdictions that work to solve the problems created by these lazy lousy Liberals.

Ontario's response is typical of public disgust with the foot dragging tactics of the lazy federal Liberals. It is disappointed. It has gone ahead and implemented its own sex offender registry called Christopher's law, named after a young boy who was murdered by a pedophile out on conditional parole.

Alberta began its work after five year old Jessica Koopman was murdered. A 14 year old Heather Thomas of Cloverdale in Surrey was murdered.

Supply

I did not have any intention of naming these children in the House, but they are our children. They lived in our communities. They had family members. How many more children must be killed before the federal government will take any action on the national sex offender registry? The Liberals are weak and arrogant and have not taken any action on this matter since the motion was passed a year ago.

Ontario's registry is much more comprehensive than CPIC since it includes 17 different characteristics used to identify convicted sex offenders compared to only 4 characteristics identified in CPIC. Personal attributes like the person's build and a recent photograph are important to keeping tabs on dangerous criminals but CPIC does not track these.

I would like to highlight the fact that even with planned upgrades CPIC in no way is a substitute for a national sex offender registry. It will not help solve the problem.

• (1700)

On behalf of Canada's most vulnerable citizens, our children, I ask the government and the solicitor general to reconsider their position on the sex offender registry and to honour the commitment they made to Canadians on March 13, 2001, when they voted unanimously to support the Canadian Alliance motion to create a national sex offender registry.

Mr. Paul Szabo (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Works and Government Services, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have listened to a lot of the debate today. I am sorry to say the message coming from the member who just spoke is disturbing from the standpoint that he asked a rhetorical question: How many children must yet be killed before we come in with a registry?

By the very nature of the question he somehow presumes that there is a simple solution to a complex problem. He somehow assumes that something in a database will be the simple solution. For every complex problem there is a simple solution and it is wrong.

The particular motion before the House right now calls for this matter to go to the justice committee to draft a bill, to start all over again. Would the member explain why he believes that we can respect the urgency he is asking for by taking so many steps backward?

He may want to address my concern about the last item of private members' business. Why are they exploiting this issue by saying any private member's bill which comes forward that has anything to do with a national sex offender registry has to automatically be votable? It is procedurally way out of line and makes no sense.

For those reasons I know many of our colleagues will vote against the motion. It is just a nonsense resolution.

• (1705)

Mr. Gurmant Grewal: Mr. Speaker, it is disturbing to mention the names of children. It is a compassionate issue. I never intended to do that and I will not do that, but how do we highlight the gravity of the situation?

Prevention is better than cure. If we do not have a sex offender registry in place once those criminals, those predators, abduct a small child the police have to start from scratch. If we had a database they

could go to it and look for possible criminals, possible repeat offenders in the area.

What is wrong with that? We need a comprehensive database that could work at preventing a possible death in the future. We need a law with teeth. We need an effective mechanism in place. We need deterrents in place. We need to give our law enforcement agencies effective tools.

According to the Canadian Police Association victims rights groups and many other agencies, a national sex offender registry would put a tool into the hands of the law enforcement agencies which could prevent the possible killing of children.

Let me also quickly mention that 75% of sex offender crimes are committed within the geographical area where the predators live, so why not have them on record? Over 44% of abducted children are killed within the first hour. Time is of the essence and an effective tool is important.

I urge all members of the House to support the motion and implement a national sex offender registry.

Mr. Paul Szabo: Mr. Speaker, it is very clear from all the speakers in this place that everyone is supportive of the objective of protecting our children.

The member should recognize we cannot have a federal registry system that does not integrate and have the support of the provinces and territories. That is precisely what has been happening over the months since March 13, 2001.

They have been working on a common understanding of the necessary components of a registry system, the principles and objectives, the respective jurisdictional roles, et cetera.

The member should understand that working with the provinces to ensure we have a consolidated consensus registry system is very important. Sending this matter to justice committee makes no sense whatsoever.

Mr. Gurmant Grewal: Mr. Speaker, the hon. parliamentary secretary can say whatever he wants to say but his government has not acted. I urge them not to make political speeches but to act. That is most important.

Mr. Bob Mills (Red Deer, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, I would like to address the member across the way as well. He talks about inaction and the government. Because my time is limited let me talk about April 8, 1997, and then I would like to go on to May 7, 1998, and talk about the inaction of the government on these sorts of issues.

On April 8 I asked the then justice minister who is now the Minister of Industry a question related to a sex offender who had just been released into our community on March 14. I had just met with 200 young parents in a school gymnasium. We had an RCMP officer there who said that this person would reoffend. We had a psychiatrist there who said that this person would reoffend. We had several other people there from police agencies who said he would reoffend.

Supply

My question in the House was what I would tell the parents of the 10th victim of this person. I will paraphrase because he gave a very long answer, but the then justice minister answered that he too had children and would also worry about sex offenders being released into his community. He indicated that the new Bill C-65 would take care of it, that it would not be a problem any more and that I should not worry about it.

I then asked a supplementary question in which I explained to the minister that it was not good enough to say that the new bill would take care of it. The answer I got from the then minister was that he would send me a copy of Bill C-65 to take back to the parents and tell them that all was fine. On May 7, 1998, I again rose in the House and said:

Mr. Speaker, in this House some 13 months ago I asked the former justice minister about a nine time convicted pedophile who was released into my riding. The experts said he would reoffend. I asked the minister what would I tell the parents of the 10th victim. The minister said that we have new legislation which will prevent an offending pedophile from ever doing this again.

On the Friday before I rose in the House the sex offender had a 10th and an 11th victim. I rose again in the House and asked what I could tell the parents. The answer from the justice minister, now the health minister, was:

Mr. Speaker, obviously the situation that the hon. member refers to is a very serious one and a very tragic one. My colleague, the solicitor general, and I have discussed this issue and we are going to be looking at it further.

That was 1998. There have now been other victims and there are other examples. Perhaps it is the truck driver driving across the country who is a convicted sex offender. He reoffends as he goes from province to province because he has changed his name and we do not have a registry. That is the issue. How could anyone not react to putting a sex offender registry in place?

Let me talk about the most recent situation in my riding. I believe everyone is familiar with the Schneeberger case and Lisa's law, which I have been begging the House to take a look at. It is a case of a convicted pedophile, a convicted sex offender, who is about to be released in another couple of years from prison. This person even foiled the RCMP for six years before he finally was convicted of sexually assaulting, raping, his 11 year old stepdaughter as well as an adult patient.

I was with the mother and her five year old and six year old little girls when we were forced to go into the prison in Bowden in May of last year with a psychologist to see a sex offender. This single mother and these two little children are now really worried. When this person gets out of prison, will they pay a price? They are genuinely concerned.

● (1710)

They want to know and they deserve to know where the person is going to be at all times. The police should know. There are the technicalities of how this is done. I have heard in the House that some people are worried about the wording. Let us change the wording. This is not a partisan issue. This is about sex offenders. This is about pedophiles who prey on those people who cannot defend themselves.

The police say that CPIC is not adequate. The police say that sex offenders are getting out, changing their names, and carrying on life

as usual. In many cases they will reoffend. Those reoffences are the problem.

Will I ever forget talking to the two fathers whose two five year old daughters had been attacked by a pedophile? Will I ever forget saying to them that parliament is not working for them, that parliament does not care? I quoted what the minister said in 1997. I quoted what a different minister said in 1998. It is now 2002 and I have to conclude that the government does not care about sex offenders. It does not care about a registry. It does not care about pedophiles reoffending. Parents should take care of their own kids because the government is not going to put that protection in place.

I ask that members look at this issue carefully and that they vote in favour of the motion.

● (1715)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bélair): 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.

[*Translation*]

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 Acting Speaker (Mr. Bélair): All those in favour of the amendment will please say yea.

Some hon. members: Yea.

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

Some hon. members: Nay.

The Deputy Speaker (Mr. Bélair): In my opinion the nays have it.

And more than five members having risen:

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bélair): Call in the members.

● (1745)

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

(Division No. 224)

YEAS

Members

Anderson (Cypress Hills—Grasslands)
Bachand (Saint-Jean)
Bellehumeur
Bigras
Borotsik
Brien
Cardin
Chatters
Comartin
Cummins
Davies
Desrochers
Duceppe
Elley
Fitzpatrick

Bachand (Richmond—Arthabaska)
Bailey
Bergeron
Blaikie
Breitkreuz
Burton
Casson
Clark
Crête
Dalphond-Guiral
Desjarlais
Doyle
Duncan
Epp
Forsyth

Fourmier
Gallant
Girard-Bujold
Grewal
Guay
Hanger
Herron
Hilstrom
Johnston
Kenney (Calgary Southeast)
Lalonde
Loubier
Lunney (Nanaimo—Alberni)
Mark
Martin (Winnipeg Centre)
Ménard
Mills (Red Deer)
Nystrom
Perron
Proctor
Reid (Lanark—Carleton)
Ritz
Rocheleau
Sauvageau
Skelton
Sorenson
St-Hilaire
Strahl
Thompson (Wild Rose)
Vellacott
White (Langley—Abbotsford)
Williams

Gagnon (Champlain)
Gauthier
Godin
Grey
Guimond
Hearn
Hill (Prince George—Peace River)
Jaffer
Keddy (South Shore)
Laframboise
Lebel
Lunn (Saanich—Gulf Islands)
MacKay (Pictou—Antigonish—Guysborough)
Martin (Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca)
McDonough
Merrifield
Moore
Penson
Plamondon
Rajotte
Reynolds
Robinson
Roy
Schmidt
Solberg
Spencer
Stoffer
Thompson (New Brunswick Southwest)
Tremblay (Rimouski-Neigette-et-la Mitis)
Venne
White (North Vancouver)
Yelich — 94

NAYS

Members

Adams
Allard
Assad
Augustine
Bakopanos
Bélanger
Bertrand
Binet
Bonin
Bradshaw
Bryden
Byrne
Calder
Carroll
Catterall
Chamberlain
Coderre
Comuzzi
Cullen
Dhaliwal
Discepola
Drouin
Eggleton
Farrah
Fontana
Godfrey
Graham
Harb
Hubbard
Jackson
Jordan
Karygiannis
Kilgour (Edmonton Southeast)
Kraft Sloan
Lavigne
Lee
MacAulay
Mahoney
Maloney
Marcil
Martin (LaSalle—Émard)
McCallum
McGuire
McLellan
Murphy
Nault
O'Brien (Labrador)

Alcock
Anderson (Victoria)
Assadourian
Bagnell
Beaumier
Bennett
Bevilacqua
Blondin-Andrew
Boudria
Brown
Bulte
Caccia
Carignan
Castonguay
Cauchon
Charbonneau
Collenette
Cotler
Cuzner
Dion
Dromisky
Easter
Eyking
Finlay
Fry
Goodale
Grose
Harvey
Ianno
Jennings
Karetak-Lindell
Keyes
Knutson
Lastewka
LeBlanc
Leung
Macklin
Malhi
Manley
Marleau
Matthews
McCormick
McKay (Scarborough East)
Mitchell
Myers
Neville
O'Reilly

Owen
Paradis
Petry
Peschisolido
Pettigrew
Pickard (Chatham—Kent Essex)
Price
Provenzano
Reed (Halton)
Richardson
Rock
Savoy
Scott
Sgro
Speller
St-Julien
Steckle
Telegdi
Thibeault (Saint-Lambert)
Tonks
Ur
Vanclief
Whelan
Wood — 141

Supply

Pagtakhan
Parish
Peric
Peterson
Phinney
Pratt
Proulx
Redman
Regan
Robillard
Saada
Scherrer
Serré
Shepherd
St-Jacques
St. Denis
Szabo
Thibault (West Nova)
Tirabassi
Torsney
Valeri
Volpe
Wilfert

PAIRED

Members

Asselin
Bonwick
Copps
Dubé
Galloway
Lancôt
Marceau
Minna
Picard (Drummond)
Tremblay (Lac-Saint-Jean—Saguenay)

Barnes
Bourgeois
DeVillers
Gagnon (Québec)
Harvard
Lincoln
Ménard
Paquette
Pillitteri
Wappel — 20

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bélair): I declare the amendment lost.

The next division is on the main motion.

● (1755)

[*English*]

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

(*Division No. 225*)

YEAS

Members

Anderson (Cypress Hills—Grasslands)
Bachand (Saint-Jean)
Bellehumeur
Bigras
Breitkreuz
Burton
Casson
Clark
Cummins
Desrochers
Duceppe
Elley
Fitzpatrick
Fournier
Gallant
Girard-Bujold
Grey
Guimond
Hearn
Hill (Prince George—Peace River)
Jaffer
Keddy (South Shore)
Lalonde
Loubier
Lunney (Nanaimo—Alberni)
Mark

Bachand (Richmond—Arthabaska)
Bailey
Bergeron
Borotsik
Brien
Cardin
Chatters
Crête
Dalphond-Guiral
Doyle
Duncan
Epp
Forseth
Gagnon (Champlain)
Gauthier
Grewal
Guay
Hanger
Herron
Hilstrom
Johnston
Laframboise
Lebel
Lunn (Saanich—Gulf Islands)
MacKay (Pictou—Antigonish—Guysborough)
Martin (Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca)

Private Members' Business

Ménard
Mills (Red Deer)
Penson
Plamondon
Reid (Lanark—Carleton)
Ritz
Roy
Schmidt
Solberg
Spencer
Strahl
Thompson (Wild Rose)
Vellacott
White (Langley—Abbotsford)
Williams

Merrifield
Moore
Perron
Rajotte
Reynolds
Rocheleau
Sauvageau
Skelton
Sorenson
St-Hilaire
Thompson (New Brunswick Southwest)
Tremblay (Rimouski-Neigette-et-la Mitis)
Venne
White (North Vancouver)
Yelich — 82

Serré
Shepherd
St-Jacques
St. Denis
Stoffer
Telegdi
Thibeault (Saint-Lambert)
Tonks
Ur
Vanclief
Whelan
Wood — 151

Sgro
Speller
St-Julien
Steckle
Szabo
Thibault (West Nova)
Tirabassi
Torsney
Valeri
Volpe
Wilfert

PAIRED

Members

Asselin
Bonwick
Copps
Dubé
Galloway
Lancôt
Marceau
Minna
Picard (Drummond)
Tremblay (Lac-Saint-Jean—Saguenay)

Barnes
Bourgeois
DeVillers
Gagnon (Québec)
Harvard
Lincoln
Ménard
Paquette
Pillitteri
Wappel — 20

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bélair): I declare the motion lost.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

[English]

BROADCASTING ACT

The House resumed from January 31 consideration of the motion that Bill S-7, an act to amend the Broadcasting Act, be read the second time and referred to a committee.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bélair): Pursuant to order made Thursday, January 31, the House will now proceed to the taking of the deferred recorded division on the motion at second reading of Bill S-7 under private members' business.

● (1805)

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

(Division No. 226)

YEAS

Members

Adams
Allard
Assad
Augustine
Bakopanos
Bélanger
Bertrand
Binet
Blondin-Andrew
Boudria
Brown
Bulte
Caccia
Carignan
Castonguay
Cauchon
Charbonneau
Collenette
Comuzzi
Cullen
Davies
Dhaliwal
Discepolo
Drouin
Eggleton
Farrah
Fontana
Godfrey
Goodale
Grose
Harvey
Ianno
Jennings
Karetak-Lindell
Keyes
Knutson
Lastewka
LeBlanc
Leung
Macklin
Malhi
Manley
Marleau
Martin (LaSalle—Énard)
McCallum
McDonough
McKay (Scarborough East)
Mitchell
Myers
Neville
O'Brien (Labrador)
Owen
Paradis
Patry
Peschisolido
Pettigrew
Pickard (Chatham—Kent Essex)
Price
Proulx
Reed (Halton)
Richardson
Robinson
Saada
Scherrer

NAYS

Members

Alcock
Anderson (Victoria)
Assadourian
Bagnell
Beaumier
Bennett
Bevilacqua
Blaikie
Bonin
Bradshaw
Bryden
Byrne
Calder
Carroll
Catterall
Chamberlain
Coderre
Comartin
Cotler
Cuzner
Desjarlais
Dion
Dromisky
Easter
Eyking
Finlay
Fry
Godin
Graham
Harb
Hubbard
Jackson
Jordan
Karygiannis
Kilgour (Edmonton Southeast)
Kraft Sloan
Lavigne
Lee
MacAulay
Mahoney
Maloney
Marcil
Martin (Winnipeg Centre)
Matthews
McCormick
McGuire
McLellan
Murphy
Nault
Nystrom
O'Reilly
Pagtakhan
Parrish
Peric
Peterson
Phinney
Pratt
Proctor
Redman
Regan
Robillard
Rock
Savoy
Scott

Adams
Allard
Assad
Bachand (Richmond—Arthabaska)
Bagnell
Bélanger
Bennett
Bertrand
Bigras
Blaikie
Bonin
Boudria
Brien
Bryden
Byrne
Calder
Carignan
Castonguay
Cauchon
Charbonneau
Coderre

Alcock
Anderson (Victoria)
Augustine
Bachand (Saint-Jean)
Bakopanos
Bellehumeur
Bergeron
Bevilacqua
Binet
Blondin-Andrew
Borotsik
Bradshaw
Brown
Bulte
Caccia
Cardin
Carroll
Catterall
Chamberlain
Clark
Collenette

Comartin
Cotler
Cullen
Dalphond-Guiral
Desjarlais
Dhaliwal
Discepola
Dromisky
Duceppe
Eggleton
Farrah
Fontana
Fry
Gauthier
Godfrey
Goodale
Grey
Guay
Harb
Hearn
Hill (Prince George—Peace River)
Ianno
Jennings
Karetak-Lindell
Keddy (South Shore)
Kraft Sloan
Lalonde
Lavigne
LeBlanc
Leung
MacAulay
Macklin
Malhi
Marcil
Marleau
Martin (LaSalle—Émard)
McCallum
McDonough
McKay (Scarborough East)
Ménard
Murphy
Nault
Nystrom
Owen
Paradis
Patry
Perron
Peterson
Phinney
Plamondon
Price
Proulx
Reed (Halton)
Richardson
Robinson
Rock
Saada
Savoy
Scott
Shepherd
St-Hilaire
St-Julien
Steckle
Strahl
Telegdi
Thibeault (Saint-Lambert)
Tirabassi
Torsney
Ur
Vanclief
Volpe
Wilfert

Comuzzi
Crête
Cuzner
Davies
Desrochers
Dion
Doyle
Drouin
Easter
Eyking
Finlay
Fournier
Gagnon (Champlain)
Girard-Bujold
Godin
Graham
Grose
Guimond
Harvey
Herron
Hubbard
Jackson
Jordan
Karygiannis
Keys
Laframboise
Lastewka
Lebel
Lee
Loubier
MacKay (Pictou—Antigonish—Guysborough)
Mahoney
Maloney
Mark
Martin (Winnipeg Centre)
Matthews
McCormick
McGuire
McLellan
Mitchell
Myers
Neville
O'Reilly
Pagtakhan
Parrish
Peric
Peschisolido
Pettigrew
Pickard (Chatham—Kent Essex)
Pratt
Proctor
Redman
Regan
Robillard
Rocheleau
Roy
Sauvageau
Scherrer
Sgro
Speller
St-Jacques
St. Denis
Stoffer
Szabo
Thibault (West Nova)
Thompson (New Brunswick Southwest)
Tonks
Tremblay (Rimouski-Neigette-et-la Mitis)
Valeri
Venne
Whelan
Wood— 186

NAYS

Members

Anderson (Cypress Hills—Grasslands)
Beaumier
Burton
Chatters
Duncan
Epp
Forseth

Bailey
Breitkreuz
Casson
Cummins
Elley
Fitzpatrick
Gallant

Private Members' Business

Grewal
Hilstrom
Johnston
Lunney (Nanaimo—Alberni)
Merrifield
Moore
Rajotte
Reynolds
Schmidt
Solberg
Spencer
Vellacott
White (North Vancouver)
Yelich— 41

Hanger
Jaffer
Kenney (Calgary Southeast)
Martin (Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca)
Mills (Red Deer)
Penson
Reid (Lanark—Carleton)
Ritz
Skelton
Sorenson
Thompson (Wild Rose)
White (Langley—Abbotsford)
Williams

PAIRED

Members

Asselin
Bonwick
Copps
Dubé
Galloway
Lancôt
Marceau
Minna
Picard (Drummond)
Tremblay (Lac-Saint-Jean—Saguenay)

Barnes
Bourgeois
DeVillers
Gagnon (Québec)
Harvard
Lincoln
Ménard
Paquette
Pillitteri
Wappel— 20

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bélair): I declare the motion carried. Accordingly the bill stands referred to the Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage.

(Bill read the second time and referred to a committee)

* * *

IMMIGRATION

Mrs. Lynne Yelich (Blackstrap, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, there have been consultations among the parties and I believe you would find the unanimous consent of the House to amend private member's Motion No. 422 standing in the name of the member for Surrey North, changing the reference to paragraph 114 (1)(s) of the Immigration Act to paragraph 101(1)(e) of the Immigration Act.

The motion was drafted when the previous act was in effect so the paragraph reference needs to be updated. The member for Surrey North is scheduled to appear before the Subcommittee on Private Members' Business tomorrow and would like to straighten this out before that meeting.

● (1810)

Hon. Ralph Goodale: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. We understand this is simply a renumbering, reflecting the new statute as opposed to the old statute. Therefore the substance of the matter does not change. It is simply a clarification with respect to the numbered section. On that basis, this is perfectly acceptable.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bélair): Would the hon. member for Blackstrap clarify and answer the government House leader's question before I ask for unanimous consent.

Mrs. Lynne Yelich: Mr. Speaker, the motion of the member for Surrey North, as amended, would read:

That, in the opinion of this House, the government should make regulations under paragraph 101(1)(e) of the Immigration Act with the effect that people claiming to be refugees pursuant to the United Nations Convention relating to the Status of Refugees will not be admitted for consideration of their claim from the following countries: the United States, New Zealand, Australia and all countries that are members in the European Economic Union.

Private Members' Business

For his presentation tomorrow, he would like the motion amended. The change is just in the numbers.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bélair): Is there unanimous consent?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

[*Translation*]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bélair): It being 6.13 p.m., the House will now proceed to the consideration of private members' business as listed on today's order paper.

* * *

[*English*]

QUESTIONS IN THE HOUSE OF COMMONS

Mr. Greg Thompson (New Brunswick Southwest, PC/DR) moved:

That an Order of the House do issue for copies of any letters since April 1, 2001, from the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and/or the Clerk of the Privy Council to Ministers and/or Deputy Ministers concerning answers to questions in the House of Commons.

He said: Mr. Speaker, I think the listening public and some members are wondering why there is a "P" in the motion number. The "P" stands for the production of papers and documents.

I am not the only member of parliament who has had trouble getting information from the government. It has been systematic on the part of the Prime Minister to shut down the House if possible and deny members of parliament the tools to do their jobs.

It is often said that it is necessary only for the good man to do nothing for evil to triumph and there are signs all around us this week that parliament is being throttled by the Prime Minister's office.

Parliament has many functions and among those we are the auditors of the government. We have the right to probe and examine those who govern Canadians. That is what we do in opposition.

When the audit system breaks down, it fails the people and this place. I will draw a comparison to the private sector. Look at the example of Enron in the United States. When documents are not forthcoming or they are altered or shredded all for the sake of secrecy, the system simply breaks down.

With this motion, we are asking that the government to be required to produce information so members of parliament can do their jobs.

We operate under a set of rules often called the standing orders. Those are the tools we need to do our jobs. When those are systematically taken away by the government, it makes it very difficult for members of parliament to do their jobs, to hold the government accountable and to do what they were sent here to do.

There are so many examples. Where can I begin? Let me start with an issue I had before the House that involved a company by the name of Lancaster Aviation. The company was given the sole right to sell military equipment by the Government of Canada on a tendering process that, without exaggeration, was extremely flawed and was precisely written to ensure that company was given the opportunity to sell military equipment.

What got me on to this was the fact that the company in question was under contract with another company in Florida by the name of Airspares Inc. owned by a convicted felon in the United States. He was a fellow by the name of Mr. McFlicker. He had been convicted of international money laundering and taking part in the international prostitution business.

We have a company in Florida under contract with a Canadian company and, of all things, selling military equipment and spare parts.

I put questions to the minister in the House. In the 35 seconds that a minister has to respond, we will not get much of an answer, if we get one at all. That is why we often call it question period and not answer period. The government did not want to come clean on the file. It did everything within its power not to answer those important questions in regard to the contract with the indicted felon in the United States.

I had to put questions on the order paper because then the government was required to answer them. To be precise, the government must answer questions within 45 days.

●(1815)

I waited almost a full year for the government response to those questions. When it did respond, the fact is it did not answer the questions. Many of the documents I accessed through access to information had been blacked out before I received them.

This goes to the very motion before us today. At the moment we really do not know any more than what we and some national journalists dug up on this story. In other words, the information we should have received from the ministry was never received and what we did receive had been blacked out.

Following September 11 we learned that the pilots involved in the attack on the World Trade Center had been trained in Florida. In terms of the aviation industry, a lot of companies are centred in Florida. A lot of aviation parts and spare parts move through that state.

Knowing that this convicted felon in the United States who owned the warehouse had Canadian aviation parts in that warehouse, I wrote to the RCMP on September 18, exactly one week after the events in New York. I wanted to know whether or not the government had followed up on this individual in Florida. The RCMP wrote back stating:

—the RCMP, as is standard practice, does not confirm or deny, nor do we provide details regarding investigations. However, I can tell you that the RCMP has not been contacted to investigate a U.S. company, Airspares Network Incorporated, and its relationship with Lancaster Aviation.

In essence the government is saying there is nothing to worry about even though parts that are owned by the Government of Canada are stored in this warehouse in Florida, which is owned by a convicted felon, an international money launderer, convicted on drug smuggling and international prostitution charges. Without having done an investigation, the government has said there is nothing to worry about. That is how the issue arrived on the floor of the House of Commons. The government has systematically shut us down. It does that on a routine basis.

Private Members' Business

An article appeared in today's *Globe and Mail* and the headline indicates that the Deputy Prime Minister is to control \$2 billion in Liberal reversal. The article states:

The federal Liberals are reversing a plan outlined in the December budget and are putting politicians in charge of handing out billions of dollars in megaproject funds.

Initially, the budget announced that an independent arm's length agency would handle the \$2 billion strategic infrastructure foundation, but legislation to be introduced today will abandon that plan and put the money under the control of the Deputy Prime Minister.

The government has been successful in shutting down parliament and denying individual members of parliament information to do their jobs.

• (1820)

This change in government policy was introduced today and individual members on this side of the House can rest assured they will have great difficulty getting information on those infrastructure projects. It comes down to a \$2 billion slush fund which conveniently has been put into the hands of the Deputy Prime Minister. I think we know why.

Last week in the House we all stood and applauded Preston Manning as he left parliament. What was the final message all members stood and applauded? It was in a headline in last week's paper: "Let morals guide you, Reform founder says". I will read from that article:

Preston Manning, the founder of the Reform and Canadian Alliance parties, retired from politics yesterday with an appeal for parliamentarians to be guided by their personal, moral and spiritual beliefs when deciding controversial matters of public policy.

That is what we are asking for here. We are asking that parliament be allowed to work and that members of parliament be allowed to do the job they were sent here to do.

Members only have to look at the power the Prime Minister's Office has to thwart the role of parliament. It has been done so successfully over the years.

It is quite ironic that I am here tonight speaking to this issue simply because the government attempted to shut me down. The government inadvertently moved this item to the order paper, which meant it was going to be a votable motion. The government got tired of hearing from me on the floor of the House of Commons in relation to those questions that went unanswered for almost a year.

When members stand in the House during question period and they do not get answers, the standing orders allow them to put those questions in written form to the government. Out of frustration many members do not put those questions on the order paper. If we were to ask the House leader or his parliamentary secretary this evening how many questions are on the order paper, there would not be a lot of them. We are so used to not getting the answers that we simply have given up using the system. My problem would be a point in any case, in the sense that frustration wears members of parliament down.

Let us look at the Liberal benches. How many members from the opposition side have trotted across to the government side in the last couple of years? The answer is too many. There were at least three from the very party I am in, one from the NDP and one Canadian Alliance member. The reason is simple. It is like the Stockholm

syndrome, where they wear down the enemy to the point where they are so frustrated they fall in love with their captors. That is the psychological phenomenon that happens.

This is like taking out the hostages. The Prime Minister trots them out and the only thing missing every time one of the members does that is the hood over the head.

In all seriousness, members of parliament get extremely frustrated when they are denied those answers. In question period particularly what does the Prime Minister do if the government does get in trouble with regard to a question? He attacks his attacker simply to shut the member down. If that does not work, Snow White, the role being played by the heritage minister, and the seven dwarfs get up for a standing ovation to shut down the opposition.

We have to continually press the government. We have to use the rules of the House effectively to get the information we need to hold the government accountable. Even then the government does not follow its own rules. It continually moves the goalposts.

• (1825)

Answers have to be given within 45 days but a member of parliament has to wait an entire year. I gave a speech in the House one night on a question of privilege regarding the delay in answering questions. When a member of parliament has to wait a year and we have to blow out the birthday candles on the set of questions, there is something wrong.

The Prime Minister, instead of being embarrassed about this is proud of it. He is proud of the fact that he can almost bring the House to a grinding halt. He is definitely the beneficiary of a split opposition. There is no question about that. There is an old expression that power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely. A case in point would be the Prime Minister.

There is no question that when the Prime Minister came to the House almost 40 years ago he was not the man he is today. He came here as a defender of the little guy. That was the reputation that brought him to this place and brought him the success he has enjoyed as Prime Minister and as a 40 year politician, but now that has eroded completely. That reputation is gone.

As the right hon. member who sits in front of me often says, the Prime Minister is no longer the man he used to be. That is so true. He is not the man he used to be. He forgot how he got here and he conveniently forgets why other members of parliament are here.

Good government comes with good opposition. That is all we are asking for in this place. We want the tools to do the job. We want the opportunity to do our jobs. We have to work much harder on this side as you well know, Mr. Speaker. You have been on this side as an opposition member. We have to work harder to do our jobs because we are often thwarted by government. That is not new and it is not unusual, but it is unbelievable the elaborate lengths to which the Prime Minister will go to shut this place down.

Private Members' Business

As a case in point, let us look at the Gagliano file. Mr. Gagliano is also part of the file in regard to Lancaster Aviation Inc. and the selling of surplus aviation parts. That had to go through his department, but do not ask the minister for information. The minister was much more articulate than he pretended to be. By the way, Mr. Gagliano conveniently has been smuggled off to Denmark to get him out of the country so he does not have to testify before the committee to find out what really went on in that department.

My colleague the member for Saskatoon—Humboldt, the critic for public works, condemned a Liberal dominated committee for voting against the motion to investigate allegations of patronage and political interference. The member for Saskatoon—Humboldt said that this was yet another example of the government's double standard on ethics and integrity in government.

More than just the people of Denmark are going to lose out on this one. Before he was appointed to the ambassadorship in Denmark, he wanted to go to the Vatican. Just imagine the Pope phoning the Prime Minister in total despair, thinking that his canonization may be in jeopardy if this guy is allowed to go to the Vatican. So he was shipped off to Denmark. We might say that Denmark is the loser in all of this but the truth is it is probably Mamma Teresa's spaghetti house where a table was roped off for the minister's dining group every night.

When the government is in trouble, it moves the person someplace, out of town and out of the country if necessary. It will sneak the person out of 24 Sussex Drive in the trunk of a car if it has to. That is what was done with the minister.

• (1830)

Members might also be interested to know the Standing Committee on Public Accounts met and recommended that an order of the House be issued for copies of all detailed expense account information for ministers and their exempt political staff. It recommended the information be tabled in the House and permanently referred to the public accounts committee. That was systematically shut down today by the government.

I look forward to the comments of my colleagues. I will sum up at the end of debate this evening.

[Translation]

Mr. Geoff Regan (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to take part in this debate on motion P-20 introduced by the member for New Brunswick Southwest. The motion reads as follows, and I quote:

That an Order of the House do issue for copies of any letters since April 1, 2001, from the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and/or the Clerk of the Privy Council to Ministers and/or Deputy Ministers concerning answers to questions in the House of Commons.

[English]

I thank the hon. member for putting the motion forward. It allows us to highlight an important aspect of House business: the written question.

In the daily business of the House much attention is paid to oral question period where members have the opportunity to question ministers who must account for their activities under their portfolio.

However also important to House business is the written question which has been part of the proceedings since 1867. Written questions allow members to ask ministers detailed technical questions that normally could not be responded to during oral question period. The practice promotes transparency of government and ensures ministers remain accountable to the House. It also enables members to be knowledgeable in policy matters they take an interest in.

The government recognizes the importance of the written question and has taken steps to ensure the effectiveness of the practice.

• (1835)

[Translation]

Last June, the Special Committee on the Modernization and Improvement of the Procedures of the House of Commons recommended that questions that were left unanswered beyond the 45 day period be referred to the relevant standing committees.

In October, this House adopted the special committee's report. The changes to the standing orders have had the effect of strengthening the requirement for the 45 day period for answers to written questions.

There has been a significant improvement in the answers to questions within the time period since the changes were made to the standing orders of the House.

[English]

Although the hon. member's motion raises an important aspect of parliamentary practice, as the parliamentary secretary to the government House leader I cannot support the motion. The motion must be opposed because the letter requested by the hon. member is considered a cabinet confidence and therefore cannot be released.

Mr. Speaker, when the motion was put forward the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons informed you that the letter sought by the hon. member was considered a cabinet confidence. The government House leader therefore asked that the hon. member withdraw his motion. Mr. Speaker, when the government House leader replied to the motion he referred you to citation 446 of Beauchesne's *Parliamentary Rules and Forms*, 6th Edition. For the benefit of the House I will read the citation. It states:

(2) The following criteria are to be applied in determining if the government papers or documents should be exempt from production:

(1) Cabinet documents and those documents which include a Privy Council confidence.

The criteria has been reproduced in chapter 10 of Marleau and Montpetit's *House of Commons Procedure and Practice* from pages 402 to 404. The criteria dates back to 1973 when the government tabled in the House of Commons its views on the general principles governing notices of motions for production of papers. Although the criteria was not formally approved by the House, Marleau and Montpetit note that the principles have been followed in the House since they were tabled in 1973.

The principles are consistent with laws passed by parliament on the subject of cabinet confidences. For example, Section 69 of the Access to Information Act exempts cabinet confidences from being released under the act. Similarly, the National Archives of Canada Act states that approval from the Clerk of the Privy Council is required before the National Archives may have access to a cabinet confidence.

Section 69 of the Access to Information Act goes on to define a cabinet confidence. It includes:

d) records used for or reflecting communications or discussions between ministers of the Crown on matters relating to the making of government decisions or the formulation of government policy;

(e) records the purpose of which is to brief ministers of the Crown in relation to matters that are before, or are proposed to be brought before, Council or that are the subject of communications or discussions referred to in paragraph *(d)*—

Cabinet confidences play a fundamental part in the Canadian system of government. Cabinet solidarity allows ministers to be frank in private but supportive of the government in public. As a group ministers are held accountable to parliament for the government's actions. As a result it is essential to respect cabinet confidences so ministers can speak freely on issues as policies and proposals are developed and debated in cabinet. At the same time each minister must be held accountable for the decisions of the whole cabinet.

• (1840)

[*Translation*]

To close, the letter the member asked for is subject to cabinet confidentiality. Therefore I must oppose this motion.

Cabinet confidentiality is a fundamental part of our system of government, and a recognized part of parliamentary practices since 1973.

[*English*]

However the Government of Canada views the written question as a vital part of our parliamentary tradition. To this end the government has been very successful in providing timely responses to written questions in the House.

Mr. Speaker, as you will know, I stand in the House on a weekly basis and provide tabled answers from the government to the many questions that come from the opposition. I am pleased to be able to do that. I have the opportunity to review the questions in advance and see the detailed answers. Sometimes they are very thick and consist of pages and pages of lengthy and detailed responses.

This is a good practice and we should follow it. However let us keep in mind that there is a reason for cabinet confidences. They are an important part of our government system.

Mr. Ken Epp (Elk Island, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, I am privileged to stand in the House today to defend democracy to the best of my ability.

The motion before us today is from the hon. member for New Brunswick Southwest. Even though it was read at the beginning I will refer to it again. It asks:

That an Order of the House do issue for copies of any letters since April 1, 2001, from the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and/or the Clerk of the

Private Members' Business

Privy Council to Ministers and/or Deputy Ministers concerning answers to questions in the House of Commons.

I will try to unravel that semi-formal comment. It means we believe that not only parliamentarians but members of the public have a right to know what is going on. The underlying principle which is so important here is that of accountability and transparency.

I should probably not tell hon. members this because it was so long ago I can hardly believe it. Some 40 years ago my wife and I were married. We moved to a little town in southern Alberta where right out of university I became the math department in a rural high school. I taught all high school math from grades 9 to 12 in a town of 200 people. The school had 320 students because they were bused in from a 50 mile radius.

The reason I tell members this is because friends asked me how I could stand living in a little town where everyone knew what I was doing. That is true. Whenever the math teacher left town to go to Calgary for the weekend everyone knew it. When we came back they all expected a report and they got it. My cousin asked how I could stand to live in a town where everyone always knew what I was doing. I shrugged my shoulders and asked why not. I was not planning to do anything bad so I did not care what they knew.

I recognize that the government probably has a few things from time to time that pertain to national security or taxation changes, and that these things would be detrimental if leaked at the time. However in the end transparency and openness is the ultimate accountability.

We have before the House the issue of whether ministerial expenditures should be made public. It is one of the things now before the public accounts committee. Here again I ask why not.

I almost hesitate to resurrect this case but some time ago it became known that a cabinet minister was using the government credit card for personal purchases such as a fur coat and a trip to Mexico. When it became publicly known it was our duty as the opposition, and I was the critic in the area, to get the facts out and confirm on behalf of the voters and taxpayers of the country that the money was repaid.

When we asked for the report using the Access to Information Act we got pages and pages which were totally blank except the page number and something at the bottom about the bank statement. There was a little code on the page. I do not remember what it was but it said the information could not be disclosed because it was personal.

That was my point exactly. It was a government credit card funded by the taxpayer. If anything in the report was not showable because it was private it should not have been there.

• (1845)

Why not simply use one's personal card for personal expenditures and the government card for appropriate expenditures in fulfilling the duties of government?

Private Members' Business

I was very disappointed at that time. I remember saying to the press and to others that it made me uneasy to have to go after a minister like that. It is against my nature to attack people, yet in that instance it appeared that we were doing so in order to try to ferret out the truth.

If there were knowledge beforehand that those accounts would be made public, what better accountability could there be? From then on no one would use the cards inappropriately because they would know that by the next week it would be on the Internet or in the paper. Therefore no one would do it. End of case.

If anyone wants to look at the accounts, let them. They would show that I went from here to here on government business, I conducted such and such government business there, I had to stay in a hotel room and I got my meals paid for because that is part of the deal. When someone works for an employer usually the employer will cover the expenses. That is legitimate. However, any personal things would not be on that card if they knew that it would be made public.

This is what we have here today. We have a motion. The parliamentary secretary has said that the government will not be able to support the motion. That is just too bad. I really regret that, because if there is an ultimate accountability of transparency, then it is not a case of whether members of the opposition get something from their enemy, the Liberal government. It really is a case of whether or not the taxpayers get satisfaction that the functions here are properly conducted. During budget time, for example, sure, that has to be kept secret, but it does not have to be kept secret after the budget is released. At that stage the documents could be made public.

I think there is a great deal that is hidden. The fact that the government member said that government members would not support this motion for the production of these papers says in essence that they have something to hide. Otherwise they would just show them.

I want to illustrate this. I do not know whether the member knows this, but a number of years ago I also had a motion on production of papers. It had to do with a totally different issue. I asked for all the papers involved in the decision to have a new Mint facility built in Winnipeg. Again, that was part of my job as critic for public works and government services. I put forward that motion and pleaded for openness and transparency. In that instance, the government voted in favour of it. Even though after that motion passed it took a couple of weeks, I had delivered to my office two or three huge boxes of paper. In a way it was almost as useless as having no information because there was so much of it. However, when my assistants and I were not busy on the immediate and the urgent and could afford to, we worked through that and finally got the answers to the questions we were asking.

Therefore the government has a precedent of supporting such a motion in my own case. It is a very good precedent. I was hoping that the government would once again say "yes, because during the election we promised the Canadian people transparency, openness, honesty and accountability, because we promised those things, we will support this motion and produce the papers". Maybe it thinks that they are secret. Maybe it will say it will not do so now but will

six months down the road because presently Canada is in a war situation and that could jeopardize it, whatever the reasons are. Maybe that could be used for part of it, but ultimately I would like to see every aspect of government totally open after a period of time.

For example, if every document were to be made accessible after 25 years, then that too would help to formulate what these members do now, because they would know that even though it must be kept secret now it ultimately would be made public and then it would look like egg on their faces if they did not do what was right. The object in the present is to do what is right. If that helps the motivation, then I think that function is fulfilled.

• (1850)

How quickly time goes when one is in the middle of something that one enjoys debating. I am sorry my time is gone. I appreciate the opportunity.

Mr. Peter Stoffer (Sackville—Musquodoboit Valley—Eastern Shore, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my hon. colleague from New Brunswick Southwest for bringing forward the motion today. The parliamentary secretary to the government House leader is my colleague, as we share neighbouring ridings in Nova Scotia, and there is one thing he forgets. He forgets the fact that it is the taxpayers of Canada who sent us here and it is to the taxpayers of Canada that we should be answerable.

I want to touch on one thing very briefly. My hon. colleague from the Conservative Party mentioned members of parliament who cross the floor. I have always thought that people who did that were the scum of the political earth, first class political sycophants. If they do not have the courage of their convictions to face their voters in a byelection before they cross the floor, they have no right to sit in this hon. House of Commons. That is all I will say about that for the moment.

I would like to read to the House something that was in the *Hill Times* this week. Jean-Pierre Kingsley, the Chief Electoral Officer of Canada, basically says:

I wouldn't use the word "corruption", but you know the best measure against that is public knowledge—

That is what we are talking about. He is talking about making the following disclosure this week to the House affairs committee:

—important money is obviously being given and the public doesn't know about it—

This is in terms of leadership, electoral and political races in the country.

He states:

They don't know how much and they don't know who and if we go to the fundamental values in the Elections Act, one of them is transparency.

He says that the Canada Elections Act is supposed to call for "total transparency" and that is no longer the order of the day.

Private Members' Business

Jean-Pierre Kingsley, a well respected person in Canada, says that about the Canada Elections Act and what we are saying in the House of Commons is that this is what we are asking for in the production of papers. We want openness and transparency, but like what Mr. Kingsley said about the elections act, it is no longer the case. It is all secretive. The Liberals have a majority, so why not use the hammer and put away any kind of effort from the opposition? I would even suspect that a lot of their own backbenchers ask very pertinent questions on behalf of their constituents.

What do we get on top of all of this? We get the treasury board saying that ministers and their staff are exempt from freedom of information when it comes to their expense accounts. What utter nonsense. Just who do these people think they are? They are elected by the Canadian taxpayers. They have absolutely no right to hide that information from them. What they say about cabinet disclosure and cabinet confidentiality is utter nonsense. That kind of drivel originates from the south end of a northbound cow.

What is incredible is how many times on a Wednesday or after cabinet meetings that we have leaks greater than a sieve to the general public. Half of the *Globe and Mail* and the *National Post* know what goes on in cabinet meetings long before most of the Liberals do.

It is just utter nonsense when they hide behind cabinet confidentiality. The reality is that we are here because of the Canadian taxpayers. We owe it to them to get the information they ask us for.

I myself have had a production of papers motion because there is a mine site about to start operating in northern British Columbia. The fact is that this mine could cause great damage to salmon bearing rivers in that area. All we asked for was information on who said what to whom about this mine site. We want to know on behalf of Canadians whether all environmental regulations are being met. We want to know if all the criteria were met before the aspects of this mine were put in place. That is all we are asking for and we get the runaround every single time.

Another aspect of the runaround is the split procurement process for the Sea Kings. Have we ever heard greater nonsense?

That is why the minister of defence has absolutely no bearing any more when it comes to the military or Canadian people. They treat him as a joke. The fact is, he cannot even do the simple thing of convincing his cabinet colleagues to buy as simple a thing as a helicopter. When he tells us that they will be here at the end of 2005, there is no way that can happen. He is simply misleading the House, but mind you, he is very good at that.

Mr. Speaker, I know I have gone off the track and I will get back on. The whole aspect of it is that when someone asks for production of papers it should not take a year to try to get an answer.

•(1855)

Those of us in opposition and, I would suspect, a lot of backbenchers are asking information of the government every day. We need to have those answers back in a timely fashion. Forty-five days is too long but that should be adequate for the government with all its resources and all the people behind it to get those answers back to us in a timely fashion.

We can only surmise and assume that government members do not want to give that information, that they want to hide behind it. That is not democracy. That is not transparency. That just makes Canadians even more angry at politicians. When Canadians get more angry at politicians they in turn ignore the democratic electoral process and we all suffer because of it. That is unacceptable.

My colleague from New Brunswick Southwest asked a very simple question and he wanted some papers on it. That is all the government had to provide. I myself asked for some papers on a mine site in northern British Columbia. I do not know how that can be so difficult. Earlier this year another colleague, from the Alliance Party, asked for production of papers. What a hassle it was to get this stuff. I have absolutely no understanding of why, unless it is my own personal bias or belief in things, but the fact is that the government is continually hiding something.

When something is hidden from an opposition member of parliament or even from the backbench, it is actually being hidden from the Canadian people. That is unacceptable. We are slowly losing the values this country was built on. What is really amazing is that as a kid growing up, although I was a New Democrat my whole life, I always had assumed that the Liberal Party would be the one that would be the most honest, the most open, the most transparent.

An hon. member: You were just a kid.

Mr. Peter Stoffer: Yes, when Pearson was in and the whole bit.

The fact is that it has changed and I cannot believe the metamorphosis of the Prime Minister, who says "I'm standing here for the little guy. I'm the little guy from Shawinigan". The fact is, I am five inches shorter than he is. The reality is that he is not standing here for the little guy. He is standing up for his corporate elite friends and those people do not want that information to come out. That is completely unacceptable.

I stand here on behalf of the federal New Democratic Party. We support the motion of the hon. member for New Brunswick Southwest. We will do everything we can to continue to harass or harangue or bug the government and we will take any steps we can in order to get information on behalf of our constituents.

Mr. Jim Karygiannis (Scarborough—Agincourt, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to speak on this motion which calls for the release of letters from the government House leader and the Clerk of the Privy Council to ministers and deputy ministers dealing with questions in the House of Commons.

This is particularly gratifying since it allows me to speak on an issue very much in the public eye these days in Canada and other democratic countries around the world. It addresses how we get a proper balance between the rights of citizens and their elected officials to be informed about the activities of government and the need for cabinet confidentiality to foster the smooth functioning of the machinery of government.

Private Members' Business

As members are aware, getting just the right balance between these important principles can be very difficult at the best of times. All of us in the House, whether we are on the government or opposition benches, agree that parliamentarians have a right to expect that the government would treat their requests for information seriously and respond to them as quickly and fully as possible.

I am sure all of us agree that Canadians, no matter where they live and what their circumstances, have a right to know what the government is doing and proposing to do on their behalf. However this right to know does not automatically trump all others.

Parliament has agreed that there are a number of other factors that must be taken into account, such as, protecting the privacy of individuals, respecting the solicitor-client privilege, and ensuring cabinet confidentiality. Indeed, cabinet confidentiality is so widely recognized as being important to the public good that virtually every democratic system in the world has some form of it in their parliamentary procedures and, in many instances, statutes. For this reason and others it is not so hard to understand.

It is clear that cabinet confidentiality improves the quality of policy formation and decision making by creating an environment where ministers can be frank in their discussions with cabinet colleagues and other senior government officials about important issues and initiatives. It is important that senior officials feel free to consider all possible options and alternatives without having to worry that their words might appear as the lead story in the next day's national newscast because these discussions often take place during the early stages of the policy process when the government may not as yet have decided on the course it will follow.

Recognizing the importance of encouraging frank and thorough policy discussion, parliamentarians from all parties have, over the years, wisely decided that some matters, such as the deliberations of cabinet ministers, should be protected and considered confidential for the good of the nation and our democratic system of government.

It is clear that the letters being requested fall into the category of privileged information and thus should not be released. The government House leader has informed the Speaker that the letters being requested represent a cabinet confidence and for this reason has asked that the member withdraw his motion.

While the government is opposed to the release of these particular letters, it nevertheless recognizes the importance of written questions to the work of the House. They promote transparency of government and help to ensure that ministers are accountable to the House. They enable ministers to become more knowledgeable about those matters for which their departments and agencies are responsible. Recognizing this, the government has taken steps to ensure that the practices in place designed to deal with such questions work as well as possible.

I had an opportunity to travel with a colleague from Britain. This colleague told me if opposition members or members of the government of the British parliament wanted to ask a question of the prime minister or any other ministers, they had to put it in writing at least six months in advance. Members put their questions after six months by which time the whole issue may be blown over.

● (1900)

We in the House have given the opposition, as well as the government backbenches, the right to ask questions the same day. We have given members the opportunity to grill ministers and to ask the Prime Minister to stand up and give answers.

While I cannot vote for the motion, since releasing this would not be in the interest of the House or the smooth functioning of the machinery of the government, I do share my colleague's desire to improve parliamentary procedure in this area. For all of us, democratic government is a work in progress.

I thank the hon. member for his commitment to ensuring the transparency of government. I urge him to work with the government in finding new and better ways of balancing the right to know with principles parliament has long accepted, such as cabinet confidentiality.

Only by working together can we, in this area of parliamentary procedure, do it right.

● (1905)

Mr. Peter MacKay (Pictou—Antigonish—Guysborough, PC/DR): Mr. Speaker, picking up on the theme of democracy being a work in progress, under this administration there is surely a lot of work to be done when it comes to democracy.

When it comes to cabinet confidentiality, the member is right. There are certain bodies of information that must be kept confidential and out of public knowledge and sphere. Military secrets are a prime example.

However there are other basic pieces of information pertaining to government behaviour and its accountability to the people of Canada who elect all members, not just government members but opposition members as well, which the public has a right to know about.

A perfect case in point was the recent decision by the President of the Treasury Board to conceal the accounts and the money spent by senior bureaucrats. This decision was justified quite wrongly in my reading of a recent supreme court case by the dissenting opinion of supreme court judges, not the majority opinion but the dissenting opinion.

A number of questions have been raised, even as recently as today, as to why the government would do this. A culture of secrecy, a culture of withholding information seems to be developing, particularly information that could be damaging.

I commend my colleague from New Brunswick Southwest and identify with his feeling of frustration. A very important role that the opposition plays is the role of truth seeker. As the member suggested in his opening remarks, the opposition's role is to probe the government. It is important for the opposition to ask important questions and receive information that the public is interested in and has a right to know.

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However, time and time again over the last nine years, the little man from Shawinigan, who is now a big enchilada millionaire from Ottawa, is so far removed from that earlier reputation that it staggers the imagination. Under his guidance and direction, and under the guidance and direction of his staff in the PMO and Mr. Goldenberg, everything that is done to throw up barriers and boundaries as to information being revealed, not only to members of the House of Commons but by limiting access to information, is done just as a matter of course. That concentration of power that has been written about in recent years is occurring at an alarming rate and is being played out here on the floor of the House of Commons daily.

The government's reputation for transparency has been put to the lie. The government's openness was spoken about, prior to elections of course, and talked about in published fairy book documents called the red book. Promises were made to cancel the GST, for example, and promises were made to revisit and renegotiate free trade. We know what happened with those promises. They went out the window.

This government now wraps its arms around the policies that were introduced, at great spending of political capital, by the Progressive Conservative government, and it now calls them its own. It now calls them great ideas and fully endorses them. The Prime Minister was in Europe insinuating that his government brought in these policies. The reason the deficit is under control today is the GST, a much hated tax but a necessary tax. It is a consumption tax. It is a fair tax.

However we cannot revisit that. We cannot rewrite history. The spin doctors and the media massagers within the Liberal ranks did a wonderful hatchet job on ruining the reputation of a party that had the intellectual honesty and courage to put in place a tax that was fair.

The issue of openness in government has never been more threatened than under this administration. A basic motion to produce papers, a motion on the order paper by the hon. member from New Brunswick, was cast to one side. He was told no, that he would have to wait. This is a very serious issue that he has brought to the attention of the House and to all members. It concerns spare parts, which were bought and paid for by the Canadian taxpayer, sitting in a Florida warehouse that is under the control of a convicted felon.

• (1910)

Surely this matter would warrant government attention, let alone government action. Yet the government does not seem to want to talk about it.

He has been given the hand. He has been told to go away. To his credit he has persevered and brought the matter forward. Thankfully there are still procedures in the House that allow him to do so, but they should be given time. We have seen the rules change. We have seen attempts, as he said, to move the goalposts to prevent full disclosure on issues such as this one.

The entire issue of ethics and public confidence has been very much shaken under the government. My hon. colleague from Nova Scotia mentioned the helicopter procurement project. One of the biggest farces ever perpetrated by any government at any time in the history of the country was the cancellation of the helicopter program at a cost of \$500 million, not even factoring in the benefits that

would have come in terms of technology, component parts that would have been made, and jobs that would have been created in the province of British Columbia. It simply was cancelled.

I remember the Prime Minister's famous words: "I will take my pen and write zero and cancel the program". Now we have men and women in the armed forces, on the east coast in particular but on the west coast as well, who patrol the coastal waters in unsafe equipment all because of ego and false pride on the part of the Prime Minister. It is a sad legacy.

The culture of clamping down, closure and secrecy is one over which the Prime Minister should hang his head in shame. That will be what historians write next to his name and not any great accomplishment. He drifted through the mandates and did what he could to shut down the House of Commons in terms of accountability and responsibility to the people.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bélair): The time provided for the consideration of private members' business has now expired and the order is dropped to the bottom of the order of precedence on the order paper.

ADJOURNMENT PROCEEDINGS

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

[*English*]

FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Mr. Svend Robinson (Burnaby—Douglas, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour of rising this evening to follow up on a question I asked of the Minister of Foreign Affairs on his first day in the House as Minister of Foreign Affairs, Monday, January 28. That question dealt with some of the most basic issues of the Canadian government's respect for international law and for Canadian values.

I asked whether our government was prepared to honour the Geneva conventions in our treatment of those prisoners that might be apprehended by Canadian forces who are joining with American forces in the operations in the Kandahar region of Afghanistan.

I would like to make it very clear in the preface to my comments this evening that my colleagues and I in the New Democratic Party strongly opposed the deployment of Canadian troops as part of this military endeavour by the United States.

We felt that the September 11 attacks should have been dealt with as a crime against humanity and certainly we should not have been part of the United States led actions in Afghanistan. Having said that, we indicated that we were certainly supportive of Canadian troop involvement under United Nations auspices with the British operation in Kabul.

That was not to be. Instead we are now in the Kandahar region. More troops will be going in under American command and, most alarming, under the command ultimately of the commander in chief who has demonstrated total contempt for international law and for the Geneva conventions.

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So far in this military operation over 4,000 innocent civilian lives have been lost. That is more than the number of lives that were lost on September 11 in the crimes against humanity attacks which took place that day. Cluster bombs remain on the ground in Afghanistan threatening the lives of children and others for generations to come. Landmines are being planted as well.

Tonight I once again appeal to our government to recognize that it should not be turning over any prisoners who may be captured by Canadian troops without ironclad assurance by the Americans that they are prepared to respect the Geneva conventions and international law.

That is not the case so far because one of the most essential elements of that international law and the Geneva conventions is that where the status of a prisoner is in question there must be an independent tribunal to determine that status. In fact the Minister of National Defence a week ago Monday, the same day I asked the question of the Minister of Foreign Affairs, when referring to the prisoners that had been captured said:

They have every right, though, for a tribunal to determine whether in fact they have status as a prisoner of war or have status as an unlawful combatant. Canada stands by that determination process in accordance with international law.

The government is breaking international law because we are turning over and are prepared to turn over prisoners to the United States without an assurance that they will be dealt with under the provisions of the Geneva conventions and with the tribunals that the Minister of National Defence has promised.

The International Committee of the Red Cross has insisted that these prisoners be treated as prisoners of war until their status has been determined to be otherwise.

It is a shameful day when the Canadian government is prepared to take its orders from George Bush and from the Pentagon and not to respect the most fundamental principles of international law.

● (1915)

Ms. Aileen Carroll (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Canada is in an armed conflict against the Taliban and al-Qaeda. We are exercising our right to self-defence under article 51 of the UN charter and article 5 of the NATO treaty. Respect for international law remains a cornerstone of Canadian foreign policy and our actions will continue to be in keeping with this precept.

Following the tragic events of September 11 Canada joined its neighbour and other countries in forming a coalition in the campaign against terrorism. As part of our military contribution Canada has committed air and naval units as well as ground troops.

Canadian special forces have been present in Afghanistan for some time and members of the PPCLI, the Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry, have arrived in Kandahar.

Canadians can be very proud of the men and women of the Canadian armed forces who are serving in extremely dangerous and very difficult conditions to protect Canadians and to defend our values.

Canada fully respects international law including the law of armed conflict and our troops are well versed in its requirements. They are

trained in how to capture and how to treat prisoners in accordance with international law and particularly in accordance with the Geneva conventions of 1949.

Regardless of a detainee's status international law provides minimum standards to ensure that he or she receives fair and humane treatment.

I assure the hon. member and the House that members of the Canadian armed forces will treat all persons in their custody to a standard that meets or exceeds that required under international law including the Geneva conventions.

The United States has indicated its willingness to abide by international law. It is based on this commitment that our troops were involved in the transfer of individuals captured in Afghanistan.

We are continuing to work with the United States and our other allies to ensure that international law is followed and that our prisoners are treated in a humane fashion.

In closing, let me assure the hon. member and all members of the House that Canadian actions will be in accordance with international law.

● (1920)

Mr. Svend Robinson: Mr. Speaker, I have two brief points. First, the parliamentary secretary has completely ignored the fundamental issue. The fundamental issue is that Canadian forces are turning over prisoners to the United States without any assurance whatsoever that they will have an opportunity to come before a tribunal to have their status determined. The parliamentary secretary has completely ignored that.

Second, I have to ask her by way of a question whatever happened to Canada's longstanding opposition to capital punishment. We are now also prepared to turn over prisoners to the United States who will be tried in military tribunals and will be subject to the death penalty. Why is it that we are prepared to turn over those prisoners without any assurance whatsoever that they will not in fact be subjected to the death penalty?

What happened? Has our opposition to the death penalty become another casualty of the war in Afghanistan as well?

Ms. Aileen Carroll: Mr. Speaker, I will resist the polemics that could lead me down a road I do not think would be useful to this discussion. It is important to note and to mention clearly in our discussion tonight that Canada takes its obligations under the Geneva conventions very seriously.

We continue to work with the Americans and with the other allies to ensure that the provisions of the conventions are respected. We are satisfied that the U.S. is treating the detainees humanely and consistent with the Geneva conventions.

We have requested clarification and expressed our concerns with the U.S. in order to ensure that we are acting together in accordance with international law.

In the interim, for operational reasons Canadian forces orders remain unchanged. We will continue to transfer any detainees to the United States as we have done in the past.

Adjournment Debate

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bélair): Pursuant to Standing Order 38 (5) the motion to adjourn the House is now deemed to have been adopted. Accordingly the House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 2 p.m. pursuant to Standing Order 24(1).

(The House adjourned at 7.22 p.m.)

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