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OFFICIAL REPORT
(HANSARD)

Thursday, February 20, 2003

Speaker: The Honourable Peter Milliken

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HOUSE OF COMMONS

Thursday, February 20, 2003

The House met at 10 a.m.

Prayers

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

● (1005)

[*Translation*]

COMMITTEE OF THE HOUSE

MODERNIZATION AND IMPROVEMENT OF THE PROCEDURES OF THE HOUSE OF COMMONS

Mr. Bob Kilger (Stormont—Dundas—Charlottenburgh, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present to the House, in both official languages, the first report of the Special Committee on the Modernization and Improvement of the Procedures of the House of Commons.

[*English*]

If the House grants its consent I will be seeking concurrence in the report later today. The report contains the unanimous recommendations of all parties regarding a new approach to private members' business.

* * *

CANADIAN HUMAN RIGHTS ACT

Mr. Monte Solberg (Medicine Hat, Canadian Alliance) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-397, an act to amend the Canadian Human Rights Act.

He said: Mr. Speaker,it is a pleasure to rise and address this issue. This private member's bill would bring some sense to a situation that has occurred regarding some rulings of the Canadian Human Rights Commission whereby it is no longer permitted of prospective employers to pretest prospective employees for drug and alcohol use.

This is a particular concern for people who are applying for jobs in the field of transportation, rather obviously, when we have people who are getting behind the wheel of a large truck and rolling down the highway. Employers would like to know ahead of time that these people are not in the grip of alcohol or drugs.

There is also another problem that this would address. The Americans test for these things and demand testing so that in fact right now it could pose problems if we are not in accordance with what they are proposing.

For those reasons I am happy to bring the bill forward.

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

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FOOD AND DRUGS ACT

Mr. Tom Wappel (Scarborough Southwest, Lib.) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-398, an act to amend the Food and Drugs Act (food labelling).

He said: Mr. Speaker, for years I have been working to ensure mandatory information and labelling on foods in Canada and for years the Department of Health kept insisting that it should be done on a volunteer basis.

Finally, in November of 2000 the Minister of Health announced regulations to ensure mandatory nutritional labelling of food. However, not everything is covered.

The bill would amend the Food and Drugs Act to specify the type of information that is to be provided on the labels of imported and prepackaged foods, and of foods sold for immediate consumption.

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

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COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

MODERNIZATION AND IMPROVEMENT OF THE PROCEDURES OF THE HOUSE OF COMMONS

Mr. Bob Kilger (Stormont—Dundas—Charlottenburgh, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, there have been consultations among the parties and I believe if you would seek it that you would find unanimous consent for the following motion. I move that the first report of the Special Committee on the Modernization and Improvement of the Procedures of the House of Commons, be concurred in.

The Speaker: The Speaker: The House has heard the terms of the motion. Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

(Motion agreed to)

* * *

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

BILL C-6

Hon. Don Boudria (Minister of State and Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank hon. members for carrying the motion.

There have been consultations among parties and I believe you would find unanimous consent for the following business to be disposed of, as follows, and I will do it step by step because we have a number of them. I move:

That on Bill C-6, the question on the amendment to the motion for third reading be deemed to have been put and a division thereon requested and deferred until the conclusion of Government Orders, February 25, 2003.

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

(Motion agreed to)

● (1010)

BILL C-25

Hon. Don Boudria (Minister of State and Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.) moved:

That on Bill C-25, the amendment for second reading be deemed to have been withdrawn, the motion for second reading deemed adopted, and the bill referred to the appropriate standing committee.

Mr. Ken Epp: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. I had a few minutes left in my speech on this bill and I am wondering whether this would preclude my ability to say two more important things.

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

(Amendment deemed withdrawn, bill read the second time and referred to a committee)

BILL C-19 AND BILL C-22

Hon. Don Boudria (Minister of State and Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as I said, we discussed these things this morning. I hope I have it correct. I apologize to members if there is anything that is a little different, but I hope not. There are another two here on which I think we have agreement.

I move that in Bill C-19 and Bill C-22, the amendments to the motion for second reading are deemed to have been withdrawn and that a recorded division on the motion for second reading be deemed to have been requested and that the vote take place at the conclusion of Government Orders on February 25, 2003.

That is a recorded division on Bill C-19 and Bill C-22.

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

[*Translation*]

Mr. Michel Guimond: Mr. Speaker, on a point of order. I would like the government House leader to clarify the meaning of the proposal for which he is requesting the unanimous consent of the House.

There are two parts in this proposal. We agree with the one concerning the amendments, but not with the second part.

Would you agree to divide this proposal for the purpose of unanimous consent?

[*English*]

Hon. Don Boudria: Mr. Speaker, perhaps we could proceed with the remaining items in routine proceedings and I will have a couple of minutes of consultation. We have made considerable progress over the last few minutes and I am sure we will find some understanding over the next couple of minutes.

* * *

PETITIONS

RIGHTS OF THE UNBORN

Mr. Tom Wappel (Scarborough Southwest, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have two petitions on the same subject matter bearing hundreds of signatures, primarily from the Chatham area of the province of Ontario.

All of the petitioners request that the government bring in legislation defining a human fetus or embryo from the moment of conception, whether in the womb of the mother or not and whether conceived naturally or otherwise, as a human being, and making any and all consequential amendments to all Canadian laws as required.

IMMIGRATION

Ms. Libby Davies (Vancouver East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to present three petitions.

The first petition is from constituents who are concerned about adopting open and fair rules, and procedures for immigration selection that do not reasonably deny access for potential immigrants based on education, background, language, religion, sexual orientation or place of origin.

● (1015)

CHILD PORNOGRAPHY

Ms. Libby Davies (Vancouver East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the second petition is from concerned citizens who want to draw the attention of the House to the need to protect our children from child pornography and to take all necessary steps to do that.

CHINESE CANADIANS

Ms. Libby Davies (Vancouver East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the third petition is from residents of the Edmonton area who are calling upon Parliament to enter into negotiations with the Chinese community on redress and urging it to deal with the unjust situation that took place at the turn of the century regarding the head tax.

RIGHTS OF THE UNBORN

Mr. Janko Perić (Cambridge, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 36 I have the privilege to present to the House a petition from some 100 concerned citizens of my riding of Cambridge.

The petitioners wish to bring to the attention of the House the fact that one Canadian child in four dies before birth from induced abortion. More than half of Canadians believe that human life should be protected prior to birth. There is still no law protecting unborn children.

RIGHTS OF THE CHILD

Mr. Larry Spencer (Regina—Lumsden—Lake Centre, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, I have a petition from a number of fine citizens of the province of Ontario.

The petitioners call upon Parliament to modify legislation to ensure that both parents can be fully involved in the life of a child after divorce. They are asking that specifically designated shared parenting be included in legislation. The petitioners are also asking that the support guidelines for the taxation system be such that support is not taxed in the hands of either party.

[*Translation*]

INUIT COMMUNITY OF NUNAVIK

Mr. Guy St-Julien (Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to present a petition signed by hundreds of residents of Nunavik communities, namely Akulivik, Inukjuak, and Kuujjuaq. The petitioners point out that the federal government, through one of its departments, ordered the killing of Inuit sled dogs in New Quebec, now called Nunavik, from 1950 to 1969.

The federal government did not hold public consultations with the Inuit communities in New Quebec. The killing of these dogs had a tragic social, economic and cultural impact on the Inuit in Nunavik. We are requesting a public inquiry, and the federal government has made no attempt to implement corrective measures to help the Inuit in Nunavik preserve their way of life.

[*English*]

PORNOGRAPHY

Mr. Norman Doyle (St. John's East, PC): Mr. Speaker, I have a petition from 250 people from St. John's East who wish to call to the attention of the House the degrading nature of pornography to individuals and society as a whole. They call upon the House of Commons to bring in legislation with a view to curbing the production and distribution of pornographic material.

* * *

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

BILL C-3, BILL C-19 AND BILL C-22

Hon. Don Boudria (Minister of State and Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. There have been further consultations and I wish to be quite clear. Pursuant to the same terms as a moment ago I would like to move that the following items be disposed of as follows. I move:

> That the amendments to Bill C-3, Bill C-19 and Bill C-22 be deemed to have been withdrawn.

Mr. Speaker, I am moving that the amendments be deemed to have been withdrawn, nothing else, that is, all amendments and/or subamendments on Bill C-3, Bill C-19 and Bill C-22.

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Speaker: The House has heard the terms of the motion? Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

(Amendments deemed withdrawn)

Hon. Don Boudria: Mr. Speaker, I understand that on some of the bills there is perhaps not much debate left, but for greater clarity and for the benefit of all colleagues we will be calling Bill C-3, Bill C-19 and Bill C-22 in that order this morning.

* * *

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.

● (1020)

The Speaker: Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[*Translation*]

CANADA PENSION PLAN

The House resumed from January 31 consideration of the motion that Bill C-3, An Act to amend the Canada Pension Plan and the Canada Pension Plan Investment Board Act, be read the third time and passed.

Mr. Pierre Paquette (Joliette, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to rise today to speak for the second time about Bill C-3, which deals with the establishment of the Canada pension plan investment board.

As I said previously, the Bloc Quebecois supports this bill. This initiative is very similar to the one Quebec took in the 1960s when it established the Caisse de dépôt et placement du Québec. This bill puts the final touch to a reform that is already underway, by transferring the Canada Pension Plan's assets to the board.

This is as good a time as any, just a few days after the finance minister tabled his budget, to point out the link between the bill and an issue of great concern to Canadians and Quebeckers, namely our aging population. As we know, the number of retirees will increase over the next few decades. The latest budget, which mentions the consequences of Bill C-3, does not adequately address the issue of making sure Canadians and Quebeckers will have sufficient savings upon retirement to keep them from poverty's doorstep. In this respect, Bill C-3 only deals in part with the issues of the aging population and the number of retirees.

There is still a lot of work to do and, as I said yesterday, I would have expected this budget to announce a thorough rethinking of the ways we, as a society, can make sure Canadians and Quebeckers put aside the money they will need when they retire.

The only rather worthwhile thing the finance minister has come up with in the budget is a measure to raise the limit of RRSPs from $13,500 to $18,000 over a number of years, but this will only benefit a minority of Canadians and Quebeckers. In Quebec, only 1.5% of taxpayers contribute the maximum of $13,500.

The budget did not put enough emphasis on this, and that is unfortunate. Although Bill C-3 is a major step toward ensuring that workers have adequate retirement incomes in the coming years, I have to admit, unfortunately, that this is just a drop in the bucket, compared to the challenges facing society in Canada and Quebec.

Therefore, as I said at the beginning of my speech, we will be voting in favour of Bill C-3. The Canadian Alliance has withdrawn its amendment, which, in our view, was totally inappropriate. When society agrees to defer tax payments for a number of Canadians, it is entitled to expect that the savings will be reinvested in Canada and in Quebec first.

As I mentioned earlier, the Bloc Quebecois will be supporting the government on Bill C-3, although we do realize that it is a just a tiny drop in the bucket, given the scope of the problem.

[*English*]

Mr. Peter Stoffer (Sackville—Musquodoboit Valley—Eastern Shore, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague from the Bloc for his comments, but does the Bloc not agree that there should be an ethical screen when it comes to the CPP? What I mean by an ethical screen is that it would invest in companies, in our environment and in labour and would not invest in companies such as tobacco companies. We know that right now the CPP Investment Board invests directly in tobacco companies. Does the member agree that they should or does he think they should not?

● (1025)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre Paquette: Mr. Speaker, I hope the board of directors of the new investment board will adopt an ethical investment policy.

As I said earlier, we are entitled to expect that what Canadians save, because Canadian society as a whole had agreed to defer income taxe for acertain number of years, will be used for absolutely irreprochable purposes, from an ethical standpoint.

I hope the board of directors of the investment board will implement such a policy, by banning all investments in tax havens and in businesses operating in those jurisdictions.

Therefore, for the time being, I will leave things up to the future board of directors. If this is not enough, then we may have to consider establishing a supervisory body.

While I have the floor, let me announce that, within the next few weeks, I will be introducing a bill providing for restrictions on Canadian investments in tax havens. That will give us the opportunity to discuss this issue further.

[*English*]

Mr. Peter Stoffer (Sackville—Musquodoboit Valley—Eastern Shore, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it gives me great pleasure to rise on behalf of my party to debate the merits of the CPP Investment Board and the bill.

One of the biggest problems that we as New Democrats have with the bill is that there is absolutely no ethical screen to direct and guide the directors on where to invest that money. It is true that we cannot tell them where to invest in every aspect, but we should be able, through legislation by the federal and provincial governments, to ensure that this money, which belongs to Canadians, does not go into companies that inadvertently or directly kill thousands of Canadians every year.

We all know that tobacco kills. That is a fact. We all know that the government spends millions and millions of dollars through Health Canada, Industry Canada and other avenues to try to get people to quit smoking and not to start in the first place. At the same time, the government is allowing a private board to invest billions upon billions of dollars of Canadians' money in companies like tobacco companies.

A while ago I asked Mr. John McNaughton of the board, "Do my pension dollars in the CPP go into investment in tobacco companies?" He said yes.

There is no ethical screen or green screen on the board. The board invests in publicly traded stocks and obviously tries to maximize the return on investment. It is rather hypocritical for parliamentarians or any legislatures to allow that to happen and then on the other hand spend millions upon millions of dollars on advertising and other avenues to get people to quit smoking. That is just one example of a problem we have. We insist and demand that there be an ethical screen placed before the board so that it will invest in companies that do not do direct harm to Canadians.

Another problem we have is the 30% foreign investment rule. The directors are allowed to invest 30% of the money in overseas markets. The government and Parliament voted for the landmine treaty. We voted to get rid of landmines from the face of the earth, but with that 30% foreign investment rule, Canadian pension dollars inadvertently could be invested in companies in the United States, for example, that make landmines. We have no idea if they are or not, but the fact is that this is what the rule exposes us to.

Again it is rather hypocritical that inadvertently we would invest Canadian pension dollars in foreign companies that could be making landmines. We simply cannot allow that to happen. We cannot on the one hand say that we are opposed to landmines, let us get rid of landmines, we do not want them on the earth and we will spend millions of dollars trying to get rid of landmines, and on the other hand use Canadian pension dollars to invest in overseas companies that make landmines. With an ethical and green screen we can prevent that from happening.

There is another thing about this, and I am really surprised that the business community has not picked up on it yet. Maybe businesses will when it hits them. With the 30% investment rule, we could be using Canadian pension dollars to invest in foreign companies that compete directly with our own Canadian based companies. We have to ask ourselves why we would do that. Why would we allow the 30% rule of the Canada pension board to allow it to invest in companies overseas or in the United States, for example, that compete directly with our own companies within Canada?

I honestly believe that the government and the people who put this together had our best interests at heart in terms of maximizing return on investment to ensure that the pension plan is there for our children and our children's children. I can appreciate that, but at the same time we should not be using Canadian pension dollars to invest in companies that compete with our own companies or in companies that may be making landmines, or even weapons of mass destruction, if we want to carry it on further. We also should not be using our investment dollars to invest in tobacco companies, which kill thousands of Canadians every year. That could be averted with an ethical and green screen.

● (1030)

The CPP Investment Board will have billions of dollars of clout. It will have a lot to say about how that money is invested in the market. A lot of companies and markets around the world will look at trying to attract that type of investment. With that kind of clout, it should be at the table saying that it will not invest in companies that directly kill Canadians. Tobacco companies kill thousands of Canadians. Companies that make landmines kill or maim thousands of unsuspecting people in the world every day.

Also, we should not allow the investment board to invest in companies that directly compete with our own. Using Canadian dollars to help foreign companies compete against Canadian companies is simply unacceptable. Until that type of screen is put forward, we in the NDP will have difficulty with this bill and with that investment board.

We hope the government and other legislators will take our concerns to heart. We hope they will put those types of screens in place so we can ensure the integrity of the investments and protect Canadian citizens wherever they live in this great country.

Mr. Norman Doyle (St. John's East, PC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to say a few words on Bill C-3, the Canada Pension Plan. As we said when we spoke on this bill before, there is nothing major in the bill that would necessitate voting against it so we will be supporting the bill.

The bill would consolidate management of all CPP investments under the Canada Pension Plan Investment Board. It would no longer require the CPP to hold cash reserves equal to three months of benefits. The bill would also make various technical amendments as well.

The Canada pension plan is a very important cornerstone of the future retirement savings plan of most or all of Canadians. Certainly it is one plan that is broadly supported by a wide range of Canadians. Canadians support the notion of a secure government pension plan but also of course it maximizes their retirement income.

Generally, Canada's system of retirement saving has three main pillars. The first is the universal old age security and the low income supplement. Second, there are the earnings based Canada and Quebec pension plans as well. Third, there are private retirement savings and pension plans.

The Diefenbaker government initiated the work leading up to the 1966 introduction of the CPP. Progressive Conservatives have traditionally viewed the CPP as a fundamental part of Canada's social safety net, an obligation that government must meet and government has to honour. More than 2.8 million Canadians outside Quebec receive retirement benefits of up to $9,345 a year, depending upon how long they contributed and their employment earnings. Special benefits are also provided for people with disabilities, widows, widowers and orphans. The Quebec pension plan is not a lot different.

For three decades the CPP was a “pay-as-you-go” plan. Premiums only provided a fund equal to two years of benefit. By 1997, there was only $40 billion in that fund, while the cost of promised future benefits totalled $600 billion. Without changes to the overall plan, premiums would rise to 14.2% of pensionable earnings by the year 2030.

In 1997 Ottawa and the provinces agreed to two major changes to the CPP. The first was to increase premiums more rapidly than had been previously planned but to cap them at 9.9% in 2003, which would be $4.95 for employees and $4.95 for employers. This equalled an $11 billion increase in the annual premium revenues. The plan right now is sustainable over the long run at next year's rate. All Canadians will receive the benefits that they have been promised and that is a very good thing.

Second, changes were made to the way benefits were calculated reducing slightly the pensions of new beneficiaries, reducing the death benefit and making it harder to get disability benefits.

Third, new funds flowing into CPP funds would be invested in the marketplace and managed by an arm's length agency, which is the CPP Investment Board. Previously funds not immediately needed to pay for benefits were loaned to the provinces at the rate paid by the federal government on its long term bonds.

By 2010, CPP assets will equal $142 billion. By 2050, they will approach $1.6 trillion. Therefore, by the turn of the decade, the CPP will be by far the largest investment vehicle in all of Canada.

● (1035)

The CPP actuary says that the changes in the bill would increase returns on CPP assets by $75 billion over 50 years. That reflects both the higher returns of a more diversified portfolio and a reduction on the amount of money that earns lower returns as part of the cash reserve. This movement of the Canada pension plan beneficiary pool toward capital markets is one that in the long term should benefit all Canadians and improve their retirement incomes.

Notwithstanding what has happened in the last year or two in the capital markets, by and large managers recorded that the return last year on the Canada pension plan compared to most mutual funds and investment portfolios was fairly good.

The CPP Investment Board's governance model is built on two fundamental principles. First, the investment professionals must be able to make their decisions without political interference, which is a good thing. Second, there must be full accountability and reporting to Parliament, to the provinces and to the people of Canada.

The legislation seems to be carefully crafted to effect accountability while ensuring independence. Whether it actually plays out that way remains to be seen. Time will tell. However it is a start in the right direction. For example, the legislation would require the board to have a sufficient number of directors with proven financial ability or relevant work experience. Why the standard would be anything lower really is not an issue. In fact that should be the minimum prerequisite.

How the directors are appointed is a departure from the traditional practice for crown corporations. The committee appointed by federal and provincial finance ministers would nominate candidates and the federal minister would select candidates from the nominating lists of the committee in consultation with the provinces. At the end of the day the appointments would still come by way of a final recommendation from the Minister of Finance, only to be rubber stamped by an order in council. That may or may not produce the very best people, but let us hope it does.

The proposed bill is a very good step in the right direction. As a result, future boards will consist of professionals with accounting, actuarial, economic and investment credentials. They will be experienced in the private and public sectors and will bring to the board informed opinions on public and private sector governance.

There are other proposed legislative measures to ensure transparency and accountability. The board will also appoint external and internal auditors who will report directly to the audit committee of the board.

Despite these powers, government can check on what is being done with the public's money. Indeed the federal finance minister will be required to authorize a special examination of the CPP Investment Board books, records, systems and practices every six years. Perhaps there might have been some utility in the suggestion of performing examinations more frequently.

Our political and public accountability is especially important at a time when some Canadians may be worried about equity markets. The Canada pension plan has to be invested for the long term. Good portfolio management expertise will prevail with the right quality of people at the management level. That one reason why it is so important that the board of the Canada pension plan be chosen very carefully.

● (1040)

We have had and continue to have significant concerns about the way in which the government makes order in council appointments. The correlation between Liberal Party contributions and the appearance in the board's order in council appointments is somewhat unsettling. The degree to which this level of partisanship can threaten the potential quality of the board is a very important consideration. When we are talking about the future retirement incomes of Canadians it is absolutely essential that the individuals on these boards be beyond reproach and that they be chosen by absolutely no partisan influence.

Furthermore, the government has to take a look at other ways to address Canadian retirement planning right now. We are just a few years away from seeing a significant reduction in the number of Canadians who are actually working and paying taxes, along with a significant increase in the number of people who will be drawing pensions.

Therefore the government should heed the finance committee's report and the PC's dissenting report both calling for the increase of RRSP contribution limits. Of course, we have seen that over the last few days. Hopefully this is a step in the right direction. It is one way in which we can defer taxes to the future as people withdraw from the these RRSPs.

The Progressive Conservative Party supports the bill but we want to make sure that the elderly in Canada do not suffer due to rigid policies and misguided principles or bureaucratic holdups. As I said a moment ago, the bill is a step in the right direction.

● (1045)

Mr. John Bryden (Ancaster—Dundas—Flamborough—Aldershot, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, let me begin by noting that I think it is quite unreasonable to suggest that any government would choose members to the pension investment board based on partisan politics or based on anything other than their expertise. That is an unacceptable suggestion. I am surprised the member made it.

Still in that context, I wonder if the member could give me an idea of what he thinks the pension investment board should be doing relative to Canadian equities versus foreign equities. My problem with what has happened is certainly the market has plummeted since the rules were changed. Does he not feel that the pension funds of Canadians should be targeted on investing in Canadian industries and Canadian equities rather than foreign equities?

Mr. Norman Doyle: Mr. Speaker, first I will address the first part of the hon. member's comments.

It is important that the board of the CPP be viewed as an independent board. We have seen it so often in the past where these order in council appointments are really only rubber stamps and that we do not always get the very best people. Even though in this particular case some of the recommendations for these members of the board come from committees. However these committees are often only rubber stamps of government as well.

We have to ensure that the Canada pension plan remains viable. As I said a moment ago, I think the government is moving in the right direction. The markets right now are very volatile. Hopefully the board and the actuaries will keep a very close watch on what is happening and ensure that Canadians have a good retirement plan for the future.

Mr. Peter Stoffer (Sackville—Musquodoboit Valley—Eastern Shore, NDP): Mr. Speaker, does my colleague and friend from Newfoundland and the Conservative Party of Canada not believe that there should be an ethical screen placed on the board? The reason I say that is that in meetings we had with the board last year, John McNaughton of the board said that they directly invested pension dollars into tobacco companies.

He knows and I know that tobacco kills thousands of Canadians every year. Yet we spend millions of taxpayer dollars to try to get people to stop smoking or to not start smoking.

Would he and the Conservative Party not believe that there should be an ethical screen to ensure that type of investment does not exist?

Mr. Norman Doyle: Mr. Speaker, I know where the hon. member is coming from and I agree with him to a certain extent. However I believe the board should always have the freedom to invest in whatever areas it wishes to invest in. We are talking about a good investment portfolio for the Canada pension plan. It has to be invested for the long term. Good portfolio management expertise will prevail with the right quality of people at the management level.

We all have our personal thoughts on tobacco and how it affects the nation as a whole but I think we have to ensure that the management board has the freedom to make the good managerial decisions that need to be made for the long term benefit of the plan.

Mr. John Bryden: Mr. Speaker, the member missed the point that I was trying to make in my earlier question and that was whether or not he favoured the billions and billions of Canadian dollars that are in the Canadian pension fund being invested in Canadian equities and Canadian securities in Canada rather than allowing the Canada pension board to invest in foreign markets, not just the United States but Hong Kong or wherever else. Surely we should try to use this money to the advantage of Canadians.

● (1050)

Mr. Norman Doyle: Mr. Speaker, I would agree with the hon. gentleman that whenever possible the money should be invested in Canada. I am certainly not an expert in finances and how these things should be invested. That is generally left to the people who are on the board and to the people who are expert in the area.

However my initial reaction would have to be that wherever possible the money should be invested in Canada for the good of Canada, and that is the long term good of the fund being preserved.

[*Translation*]

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

Some hon. members: Question.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bélair): The question is on the motion. Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bélair): All those in favour of the motion 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 Acting Speaker (Mr. Bélair): In my opinion the yeas have it.

And more than five members having risen:

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bélair): Call in the members.

And the bells having rung:

[*English*]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bélair): At the request of the government whip, the vote is deferred until Tuesday, at the end of government orders.

* * *

[*Translation*]

FIRST NATIONS FISCAL AND STATISTICAL MANAGEMENT ACT

The House resumed from January 30 consideration of the motion that Bill C-19, An Act to provide for real property taxation powers of first nations, to create a First Nations Tax Commission, First Nations Financial Management Board, First Nations Finance Authority and First Nations Statistical Institute and to make consequential amendments to other Acts, be read the second time and referred to a committee.

Mr. Yvan Loubier (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot, BQ): Mr. Speaker, you took me a bit by surprise. I thought that the government had a bill to defend, especially when it is its own bill. However, we find that even the government's own members are not willing to defend a bill such as Bill C-19.

We can see why. Bill C-19 is part of a major federal offensive, along with Bills C-6 and C-7, against all the traditional land claims and the rights of Canada's first nations, such as the inherent right to self-government, the right to a land base, the right also to compensation for the 130 years during which they were subjected to the Indian Act—the most retrograde law ever conceived by man, and this law was created right here in Canada 130 years ago. All these rights, as well as the respect to which our first nations are entitled, are being trampled by Bill C-19. And, of course, Bill C-19 is part of a whole scheme that also includes Bills C-6 and C-7.

We always come back to the same basic problem. When the government came up with Bill C-19, it had not even bothered to adequately consult first nations. This is an attempt to shove a bill they do not want down their throats. This is an attempt to undermine their credibility, to say for example that the Assembly of First Nations does not represent all first nations in Canada, which is false. There is even a federal law that recognizes the Assembly of First Nations as the spokesperson for first nations in Canada.

But, as the old saying goes, divide and conquer. The Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development has taken this old adage to heart and is being quite machiavellian in how he applies it.

They are even going to bypass the Assembly of First Nations and choose some Liberal Party sympathizers. The selected individuals picked by the Liberal Party of Canada and by the Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development will then say that they agree with the government, that everything is great and that everything in the bill is great.

We tried to amend Bill C-19. We tried to convince the minister that this bill was not quite right, that first nations had very legitimate claims, that they wanted to be consulted and that they wanted to be respected for who they are. The minister turned a deaf ear.

Many representations on Bill C-19, C-6 and C-7 were made. Currently, Bill C-7 is at the committee stage. Each time we have proposed amendments to improve the contents, to ensure that the rights and demands of the first nations of Canada are respected, the minister has turned a deaf ear and said, "I know what I am doing. I consulted, I have held 400 meetings since last year and this is the result of those consultations".

What the minister forgets to mention is that those 400 consultations were probably each about five minutes long. How can the first nations, under such circumstances, make positive contributions? Because these bills are for them. How can they satisfactorily contribute to replacing the much-hated Indian Act with legislation that recognizes and respects them for who they are?

We had supported the principles in Bill C-19. Given that the minister does not want to hear about the major changes that need to be made, we are forced to change our minds. We will oppose Bill C-19, which is part of a broad offensive to get first nations to accept the unacceptable, which no Canadian, and certainly no Quebecker, would do.

Bill C-19 creates a statistical institute, a tax commission and a first nations financial management board.

● (1055)

As if aboriginals needed three additional ultra bureaucratic entities. The Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development's speciality is bureaucracy, cumbersome administration and piles of paperwork. Aboriginals do not need any of this. They want nothing to do with it. These are not their real problems.

This is not what they talk about when they appear before us in committee or when we meet with them individually. They want us to address the real problems in the aboriginal communities, such as land claims that have been on the back burner for decades, compensation for the harm caused to them and aboriginal health issues.

In terms of health, there is no need to draw a picture. Across Canada, aboriginals' health is worse than anyone's. They contract infections that no longer even exist in our communities. For instance, there is a high incidence of tuberculosis among the Lubicon in Alberta.

These communities are struggling with substance abuse problems in young children. Recently we saw young children 6 or 7 years old behind homes sniffing gasoline fumes or glue. These are real problems.

There are major problems with drinking water across Canada. Imagine, that was a discovery for me. Some regions of Canada are in the same situation as the developing countries. I thought drinking water problems were mainly in Africa, where CIDA is doing such excellent work.

I think we need to look a little closer at ourselves and stop thinking that underdevelopment is something foreign to us. The reality is that the first nations have been marginalized. They do not have drinking water. Considering the importance of safe drinking water for health, and particularly for child development, I hardly need say how ashamed this makes me feel. This is a problem that must be addressed.

Moreover, to dispel any old prejudices that may still be lurking in the minds of any of my colleagues, what the Auditor General said was not that there were administrative problems in the first nations communities, but that those problems lay within the Department of Indian and Northern Affairs.

I see these three new entities relating to taxation and statistics as a way for employees of that department to hang on to their jobs. The right thing to do today would be to abolish the despicable Indian Act, which treats aboriginal people like children and kept them on the reserve for so many decades. This legislation has been around for 130 years now and has stripped them of their resources.

If we abolished the Indian Act, we would at the same time abolish some, if not most, positions at Indian and Northern Affairs. But they will do as they did at Fisheries and Oceans. There are no more fish, but there are hundreds of employees. Why? Because the changes in the fish stocks must be monitored. SInce these people have been monitoring the situation, fish stocks have decreased. But that justifies jobs at Fisheries and Oceans.

It is worse at Indian and Northern Affairs. I met some of the employees when they appeared before the committee. Some had that typical attitude that is so despised, people for whom what is important is to hang on to their jobs, not to work for the well-being of the aboriginal community or to help it break out of the vicious circle that has been in place for the past 130 years and has the first nations mired in chronic underdevelopment, which gets in the way of their future development and their children's future development, and strips them of pride and dignity.

But officials are not there to work on these problems. Of course not, they are there to create bureaucratic entities. The Auditor General said that first nations are overadministered.

Almost all aboriginal communities are required to fill out 168 lengthy forms every year on their administration, on how they operate, down to the last penny. One hundred and sixty-eight forms, do you know what that represents? That is three government forms per week in every aboriginal community. Keep in mind that there are some communities with about 100 people.

It is the Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development that requires this. The Auditor General did not criticize aboriginals for being sloppy when it comes to the administration of aboriginal affairs; she criticized the Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development for being sloppy and ineffective and for its excessive bureaucracy.

● (1100)

That is who she criticized. Not only has the government failed to rectify the situation, but it has added to the problem. First nations will now have to produce even more reports and fulfill the requirements of even more administrative bodies.

What about the real problems facing aboriginals, that we in Parliament should be solving? What are we doing about drinking water? What are we doing about health problems? What are we doing about education problems?

There is a few million dollars here and a few million dollars there. The government will point to the budget. True, some tens of millions of dollars were given for health, as well as for education, but that is completely inadequate. Particularly since Bills C-6, C-7 and C-19 impose additional administrative requirements. But the resources are not forthcoming. Put plainly, first nations are given the same resources, and they have to fight to keep their heads above water to assert their rights, to fight the federal government in the courts, to build their case and to solve community problems with what little resources they have. These same resources will now be used to fulfill the requirements of these three new administrative bodies and also the new provisions that are contained in the governance legislation, Bills C-6 and C-7.

All of this is outrageous. It really is ignominious. I asked to be given the first nations file because it was a very interesting one, even if it was one we very seldom heard about. I asked for this file because there were things that I wanted to resolve and understand. I have a hard time understanding why a country like Canada, that prides itself on being a country where rights and freedoms are respected, a country that even adopted a charter of rights and freedoms, a country that includes in every throne speech an explicit reference to the aboriginal people and to respect for their culture, their language etc, does not do anything in this regard. It talks a lot, but the disgrace is that not much is happening.

Now I understand why. After the Erasmus-Dussault commission, everything was in place for the Canadian nation and the first nations to negotiate solutions to problems as equals. The report was lengthy. Consultations had been held. But no. Our fine Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development, a follower of Machiavelli, divided and conquered, and rammed through new measures that were supposed to improve the act, the infamous Indian Act. There was a flurry of protests and all first nations representatives opposed these bills. However, the minister bragged about the fact that he could count on the support of his friends. He has a few aboriginal friends. It looks good to have a few aboriginal friends when you are the Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development.

We are lucky. We are really lucky—and I see that there is agreement here—that aboriginals have not revolted more than they have up to now. Because if I were an aboriginal and I had been treated like that, I would have dumped the standing committee. I would have come to Parliament a long time ago together with all 638 first nations. I would have come to Parliament a long time ago and mobilized numerous resources to say, “That is it. We have rights. You put us in reserves 130 years ago. You crushed us. You took away our dignity. You tried to get rid of us. Now, that is it. You will not repeat the past with Bills C-6, C-7 and C-19”.

They appeared a few times before the United Nations. Their claims were even successful. There are, for example, the Alberta Lubicon. They are in the news now because, several decades ago, they had been promised their territories, which they are entitled to, and they were also promised compensation.

What happened in the meantime? There are rich oil and gas companies in Canada. They have the support of the Minister of Industry even if they are hurting the economy now and even if the price of heating oil has gone up 30%. The minister is on their side. He is siding with the oil and gas companies. This is not the first time that the government has sided with them.

● (1105)

As soon as major oil deposits were discovered on the land claimed by the Lubicon, we started hearing that they might not have any right to them, that the land might not be theirs. In the 1930s, official papers were even falsified. What a fine reputation. If you do not believe me, the matter was taken all the way to the United Nations, where the Canadian government was criticized for its lack of respect for the human rights of the Lubicon Lake Indians.

Quite clearly, the Lubicon no longer had any territorial rights. As soon as these rich oil fields were discovered, the matter of profits for large oil companies arose. These companies cozy up to the government, and this has been going on for decades.

The government was both defendant and adjudicator, collecting royalties on the oil resources developed by the big companies. So, the Lubicon were ignored. And this injustice has been going on for 70 years. Even a UN resolution was not enough to shake the government.

Government representatives go around the world presenting Canada as a supporter of rights and freedoms, talking about our Charter of Rights and Freedoms, while within Canada there are these injustices. After 130 years of the Indian Act, the government is spreading the injustice and making matters worse with bills that no one wants, namely Bill C-6 and Bill C-7. The aboriginal nations do not want these bills because they do not respect who these people are; they do not respect their cultures and traditions.

It is totally unacceptable to be presented with such bills, especially since there is a common thread linking the three we are debating, when we include Bill C-19: an attempt to erode the rights of aboriginal people. The federal government is trying to shirk its fiduciary responsibility.

Why I am making such a statement? Because there is no non-derogation clause in Bill C-19, in Bill C-6, or in Bill C-7. A non-derogation clause would reassure first nations by guaranteeing that, despite the provisions found in Bills C-19, C-6 or C-7, their aboriginal rights, their inherent rights to self-government, their land rights, their rights to compensation, and their rights to pride and dignity are not beign threatened. This is what a non-derogation clause is all about. There is no non-derogation clause in these bills even though, in the past, such clauses were included to reassure aboriginal nations about the fact that even though a bill brought about some changes, even though it included new provisions, their claims and their rights were not in jeopardy. A non-derogation clause does not give them anything, it simply gives the assurance that their rights will be respected.

Over the past 30 years, in a number of rulings, the Supreme Court has consistently come down in favour of respect for aboriginal nations and their inherent right to self-government. These decisions compelled the federal government to settle numerous disputes that had been going on forever.

All these rulings were in favour of aboriginal nations and, today, we fare faced with a situation where, instead of following up on the rulings of the Supreme Court, instead of implementing the recommendations of a royal commission of inquiry that tabled its report a few years ago, the government is repeating its past mistakes. Instead of treaties written in archaic language over a century old, we have modern bills that are every bit as insensitive and cruel to aboriginal nations.

For all these reasons, we will strongly oppose Bill C-19. We will also strongly oppose Bills C-6 and C-7, which are utterly objectionable.

The members of the Bloc Quebecois members will fight for the aboriginal nations of Canada and Quebec, not to give them more rights than we have, but to ensure respect for the rights that they do have, and to settle disputes once and for all, in a climate of respect and dignity, nation to nation. Equality between nations must go beyond words; it must be a concrete reality, and it must be based on respect and dignity.

● (1110)

[*English*]

Mr. Jay Hill (Prince George—Peace River, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague from the Bloc Quebecois for his comments. He certainly was very emotional about the subject.

While I agree with the thrust of some of his comments in the sense that there is much more the government could have been doing for our aboriginal people, I want to draw attention to one area of his remarks, that the bar has been set at a very high level in the case of administration. He said there was too much administration.

While I agree with his general thrust, one of the things that I have always noticed is terribly wrong with the way aboriginal people, especially on the reserves, are treated in this country is that the taxpayers provide billions of dollars in different programs. Whether it is through the Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development, the Department of Human Resources Development or provincial agencies, billions of dollars flow to the native communities, yet when I go to the reserves in my riding of Prince George—Peace River, I do not see a lot of improvement.

It seems to me there are far too many flagrant examples of the chiefs and those in power on the reserves getting hundreds of thousands of dollars in supposed wages while their people are no better off.

The member talked about how scandalous this is. I think it is scandalous that in many cases the leadership of the aboriginal people end up with by far the lion's share of the aid that flows to those communities while the people themselves live in poverty and squalor.

How would the member hold those individuals accountable?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Yvan Loubier: Mr. Speaker, with all due respect to my Alliance colleague, I must say that he has repeated at least two clichés that have been around for years regarding aboriginals, things that the general public are being led to believe are true. However, it is false to claim that aboriginals waste more money than Canadians and Quebeckers.

I could give examples of mismanagement. Every year, for the federal government alone, the Auditor General has seven or eight thick volumes full of examples of government bungling, overinflated bureaucracy, waste and financial administration decisions that are totally ridiculous and shameful for us as taxpayers. That is the first thing.

When the Auditor General appeared before the Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs, Northern Development and Natural Resources, she did not say that there was more waste within aboriginal communities or that management was not as good; she said that these communities were overaudited.

This means that not only are they required to file audit reports and not only do 96% of the 633 first nations meet those audit requirements, but it is excessive. They are overaudited. There is not enough auditing here, and there is too much of it there.

According to another very popular cliché, billions of dollars are handed out to the first nations and yet things do not improve. The Department of Indian and Northern Affairs manages billions of dollars. As I said earlier, the Department of Indian and Northern Affairs is responsible for implementing a shameful, outdated and racist act, the Indian Act, that treats the aboriginal people like children.

One has to wonder why, after spending billions of dollars, we have been unable to assist the plight of the aboriginal people. Is it because we should be getting rid of this infamous act? Is it because we should be getting rid of the Department of Indian and Northern Affairs and implementing self-government for the aboriginal people so that we can negotiate with them nation to nation and let them control their own agenda? It does not make any sense: we are not giving them money, we are granting them compensation for all the harm we are causing them on a daily basis. That is what we are doing.

Do members not think that aboriginal Canadians would prefer to have their own government, to be self-governing, to choose their own leaders according to their traditions and customs? They deserve as much dignity as us. We have to be careful here. The Alliance is much too fond of clichés.

I would like to talk about another incident that happened at the Standing Committee on Aboriginal Affairs, Northern Development and Natural Resources. Someone said, "Aboriginals have trouble managing their affairs". It was a senior official whose name I forget, but it was someone hired by the Liberal government of Canada. Speaking about their finances, he was saying, "Several communities are overly indebted".

I asked what proportion. It was 30%. I then asked him, "Could you say the opposite? In maths, we say that 100 minus 30 is 70". We could therefore say that 70% of the aboriginal communities manage their affairs well and are not overly indebted. This is a little more positive, this is a clearer indication of what is going on.

I reminded him that the federal government, with an accumulated debt of $530 billion, cannot be an example for anyone. There is a central government and a huge accumulated debt of $530 billion. As for giving advice to the aboriginal people, 70% of whom manage their affairs properly and have no excessive accumulated debt, I think we can forget about that.

The public hears all these clichés and believes them. Then, when we settle land claims or resource claims or hunting and fishing claims, people say, "This is disgusting. They are being given so much. They already have billions of dollars. They are being given all the land, all our taxpayers' money". This is the result of the clichés that some friends of the Alliance, even by some individuals who used to sit in this House, are repeating all over the place.

I think we must be very careful when we talk about aboriginals and we must also be honest with what we say about them.

● (1115)

[*English*]

Mr. John Bryden (Ancaster—Dundas—Flamborough—Aldershot, Lib.): Yes, I quite agree, Mr. Speaker. The time has come to be honest, or at least shall we say candid, in reporting what the Auditor General actually said because the Auditor General also appeared before public accounts. What the Auditor General had to say about the various forms and the bureaucratic difficulties that the aboriginal and first nations were involved in was the fact that there was no standard system across the nations that was necessary.

The Auditor General told the public accounts that her observations about the paperwork, the red tape that was surrounding first nations, she expected it would be overtaken by the excellent legislation that was being proposed by the minister for Indian and northern affairs which would bring the system to chaos. The member knows full well what the problem is among our aboriginal nations, our first nations, is financial, it is financial management.

[*Translation*]

The member knows fully well that this is an excellent bill. Let me give an example. This bill proposes a first nations financial management board. The mandate of this board is to assist first nations in developing the skills required to meet their financial management commitments.

What is the problem with that? It strikes me as a good thing.

● (1120)

Mr. Yvan Loubier: Mr. Speaker, with all due respect to my colleague, who is often very clear-headed and compassionate, I think that this is not the case when it comes to Bill C-19.

As I was explaining earlier, the principles contained in this bill may look good. We even gave our support in principle when the bill was introduced. The problem is how we are going about this. We are doing everything backwards.

We have not granted self-government, nor have we encouraged it for some first nations. Yet, we are already imposing systems that treat them like municipalities.

My colleague says that not all communities are alike. Do they need to be alike? Do we need to manage one nation the same way as another? Would we impose our way of doing things on France, on Belgium and on the U.S.? There are traditions and there are also customs.

Recently, the Standing Committee on Finance heard from an American expert who had studied the evolution of aboriginal communities in the United States. According to him, the governance experiments that worked were those that respected first nations' ways, their ancestral practices for choosing leaders and managing and making decisions that affect the community. That is what worked.

Other attempts to impose standardized methods were a complete failure. We need to consider the experience gained elsewhere.

[*English*]

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

Some hon. members: Question.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bélair): The question is on the motion. Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bélair): All those in favour of the motion 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 Acting 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.

And the bells having rung:

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bélair): At the request of the opposition, the vote is deferred until Monday after government orders.

Hon. Don Boudria: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. I think the whips have informally agreed, in addition to what has just been proposed, that the votes be further deferred until Tuesday at the conclusion of government orders. Therefore, I would seek consent to do that.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bélair): Is there unanimous consent to defer the vote until Tuesday after government orders?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

* * *

● (1125)

DIVORCE ACT

The House resumed from February 4 consideration of the motion that Bill C-22, an act to amend the Divorce Act, the Family Orders and Agreements Enforcement Assistance Act, the Garnishment, Attachment and Pension Diversion Act and the Judges Act and to amend other Acts in consequence, be read the second time and referred to a committee.

Mr. Gurmant Grewal (Surrey Central, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise today on behalf of the constituents of Surrey Central to initiate the debate on Bill C-22, an act to amend the Divorce Act, the Family Orders and Agreements Enforcement Assistance Act, the Garnishment, Attachment and Pension Diversion Act and the Judges Act and to amend other acts in consequence. There are many acts to be amended by Bill C-22.

Since the 1968 passage of the first federal Divorce Act, divorce has become increasingly prevalent in Canada. According to the latest numbers released by Statistics Canada, 71,144 couples divorced in 2000. Before reaching the 30th wedding anniversary nearly 38% of marriages will end. That is more than one-third. One in three marriages will end before even reaching their 30th wedding anniversary.

An important consequence of divorce is more and more disputes over the custody of children and parents' rights to access them. Custody of dependants, usually children, was granted through proceedings in one out of every three divorces in 2000. In the remaining two out of three divorces, couples arrived at custody arrangements outside the divorce proceedings, or they did not have dependents.

The proposed changes in Bill C-22 primarily affect child custody arrangements between parents after divorce. This is important for we should be worried about the impact divorce has on the lives of children.

For far too long family law legislation has perpetuated a battle of the sexes, a war between mothers and fathers.

The justice minister, when unveiling this act, said that he wanted to return family law to its core value, the best interests of the child, by making parenting after divorce less of a battle and less about mothers and fathers. Though males are perceived to be the victims of bias in family law, even that has resulted in some suicides. It is very sad.

A large number of Canadians have been critical of the terms custody and access because in their view the terms encourage too many parents to focus on their own rights rather than on their responsibilities and what is in the best interests of their children. The terms also promote the idea of a winner or a loser in a custody battle. Giving custody to one person takes it away from another. The terms represent a poor start for the future and give the impression that there is a winner and a loser, but the children are often the real losers, and we should do something about that.

Under the proposed reforms, the terms custody and access will be eliminated for the purpose of the Divorce Act. Removing the win-lose connotations will contribute to reducing levels of parental conflict and stress. The new approach used by the act and in legal proceedings will help parents to focus on their most important obligation, which is making sure their children receive the care they need. This terminology simply does not reflect the idea of co-parenting.

The proposed reforms will also allow parents, not the court, to figure out how to carry out their responsibilities to their children. Mediators, counsellors and lawyers will be able to assist if they cannot come to an agreement and judges will issue parenting orders only if mediation fails. The negative consequences for children are aggravated if parents become involved in protracted conflict over separation.

The proposed legislation is based on a parental responsibility model. Its underlying concept is that both parents will be responsible for the well-being of their children after separation or divorce. How they carry out their obligations to their children is largely a matter for them to decide using the best interest criteria as a guide.

● (1130)

The amendments to the Divorce Act include a list of best interest criteria for parents, lawyers and judges to consider when determining the living arrangements of a child involved in divorce.

These criteria include: the child's physical, emotional and psychological needs, including the child's need for stability, taking into account the child's age and stage of development; the benefit to the child of developing and maintaining meaningful relationships with both spouses and each spouse's willingness to support the development and maintenance of the child's relationship with the other spouse; the history of care for the child; any family violence record; the child's cultural, linguistic, religious and spiritual upbringing and heritage; any plans proposed for the child's care and upbringing; the nature, strength and stability of the relationship between the child and each spouse or each sibling, grandparent and any other significant person in the child's life; the ability of each person,in respect of whom the order would apply, to care for and meet the needs of the child; to communicate and co-operate on issues affecting the child; and finally, the safety and well-being of the child.

A mixed race child might end up spending more time with a parent who is considered to be in the best position to provide a cultural education to that child.

In 1998 the Special Joint Committee on Child Custody and Access released its report "For The Sake of the Children". The Minister of Justice claims that the government has taken an approach to family justice reform that is consistent with the spirit of this special joint committee's recommendations in that it removes the terms "custody" and "access" from the Divorce Act and bases parenting decisions solely on the best interest of the child.

However the government has rejected the committee's recommendation, as it often does, that the government adopt the shared parenting concept in which equal access to children is presumed.

While women's groups urged the government to make no changes to the custody and access regime, father's rights organizations campaigned tirelessly, but unsuccessfully, for the inclusion of a presumption in the law that each parent had equal access to children. There is little doubt that children benefit most when they have frequent and liberal access to both their parents.

Father's groups lobbied for the presumption of shared custody because of the widely held perception that courts are inherently gender biased. Judges award sole custody to mothers 60% of the time, joint custody 30% of the time and sole custody to fathers just 10% of the time.

The assumption of shared parenting should be built into the Divorce Act. Shared custody encourages the real involvement of both parents in their children's lives.

Psychologists and social workers tell us that children benefit from maintaining a relationship with both parents after divorce. Many studies show that children's emotional development is enhanced if both parents are involved after divorce. Parents denied a significant role in the life of a child might withdraw gradually, to the detriment of the child.

Some women's groups caution that a presumption in favour of joint custody might lead to its imposition in inappropriate cases and could allow an abusive father to continue to harass his wife and children. However clearly stated criteria would prevent this from occurring. Their position also overstates the occurrence of abuse and portrays men in a negative light.

Children benefit from consistent, meaningful contact with both parents, except in exceptional cases, such as those where violence has occurred and continues to pose a risk to the child.

What counts the most are the children, the kids. They are our next generation, our future and they certainly deserve our best care.

We know that family is an institution. Family is the foundation of any nation. United and peaceful families are stronger families. We need to promote that. Stronger families are prosperous families. Stronger and prosperous families can raise children better for the future of the country.

Do I need to remind everyone that stronger families make strong communities and stronger communities make a stronger nation?

● (1135)

Mr. Jay Hill (Prince George—Peace River, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate my colleague's remarks on Bill C-22. It is important legislation for which parents and, more important, children have waited a long time.

Unfortunately, as he alluded to in his remarks, the government missed the boat entirely. It missed the fundamental principle that was enshrined in the report "For the Sake of the Children". The fundamental guiding principle of all the 48 recommendations that were contained in the joint House of Commons—Senate report was that of shared parenting.

I would like to refer my colleague to the comments of the Minister of Justice on February 4 when he introduced Bill C-22 in the Chamber. I am quoting from *Hansard*. The minister said:

> The term "shared parenting" has become associated for some people with a presumptive starting point about the appropriate parenting arrangement for children upon divorce. As a result, using the term "shared parenting" in the Divorce Act would have led to confusion.

My belief and the belief of the committee is exactly the opposite. To clarify that both parents upon divorce have equal standing, responsibilities and obligations to their children, we need to have shared parenting enshrined in the Divorce Act. It is the fundamental building block of the whole report.

I would ask my colleague to comment on that.

Mr. Gurmant Grewal: Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for Prince George—Peace River for his excellent contribution in the House on the issue of shared parenting. He has done tremendous work on this. I am quite confident that because of his guidance the official opposition has led this issue through to the House in a meaningful way.

It is disappointing that out of the 48 recommendations that the joint committee recommended to the House the government has not listened to those recommendations nor has it followed through on them as it normally does in other cases that we see. Committee work becomes meaningless when members work hard to come up with recommendations and the recommendations go nowhere except for collecting dust on some shelf. That is disappointing.

I think shared parenting is the fundamental foundation of the Divorce Act. If the government does not see that the sharing concept is the fundamental foundation for the Divorce Act, it is leading the nation in the wrong direction. Whatever we decide to enshrine in the law will not be effective, will not be meaningful and will not strengthen the institution of families.

I am definitely in favour of the point the hon. member highlighted. We do need to clarify that equality does exist in the Divorce Act. When parents divorce or separate they need the opportunity to have equal responsibility for the children. That is a fundamental building block of the family. It keeps the lives of the children meaningful, and they would not miss either of their parents. That is important, and the government must understand that, absolutely.

Mr. Larry Spencer (Regina—Lumsden—Lake Centre, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, we just referred to the confusion that was suggested by the minister when he introduced the changes to the Divorce Act.

I want to ask the member who just spoke if he does not think that there is already a good amount of confusion that happens in the children. We are supposed to be operating from the premise of the best interests of the children. I think that we will find a lot of confusion in the children.

Does the member think we should be more concerned about the confusion we cause in the lives of children rather than the confusion we might cause in the courts?

● (1140)

Mr. Gurmant Grewal: Again, Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for the very important point he has raised. Confusion is a serious issue. It is hard for young and small children to understand, when they love both parents equally, why they are denied access to their parents or why the law has determined that they should not have equal access to both parents. It is very disappointing for them.

I am disappointed about the government's general attitude toward dealing with the various issues. It does not listen to Canadians. I know it does not listen to the official opposition for political reasons. However the government should listen to the hundreds of thousands of psychologists, social workers and parents who are affected by the whole misconception of equal access and responsibility of both parents by the government enshrining this into law.

We already know that there have been perceptions that courts have been biased toward females. I have gathered data on males, the fathers, who have committed suicide one after the other. That is very disappointing.

Not only that, the justice minister himself does not understand the issue. His confusion definitely will be reflected in the way the government members vote on the issue. I believe the justice minister should understand and listen to at least the hundreds of thousands of Canadian psychologists, social workers and parents, if not the opposition members.

Mr. Jay Hill: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the opportunity to pose a second question to my colleague. At the outset, obviously the debate is about to end on second reading of the bill. It then will proceed to the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights. I look forward to that process because it will give Canadian Alliance members the opportunity to bring forward meaningful amendments on behalf of the children of Canada to try to correct the inadequacies, and there are many, in the proposed legislation, Bill C-22.

The question I want to pose to my colleague concerns the confusion when a government on behalf of the citizens of the country ratifies a United Nations convention, then turns around and brings in legislation like Bill C-22. I refer my colleague to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child which the Canadian government ratified in 1991. Therefore it has been supported by Canadians through their government.

Part of article 9 states that parties shall respect the right of the child who is separated from one or both parents to maintain personal relations and direct contact with both parents on a regular basis, except if it is contrary to the child's best interest.

Could my colleague comment on that? It is confusing when a government on behalf of the citizens ratifies something like that and then brings in legislation that does not reinforce the concept of shared parenting and the rights of the child.

Mr. Gurmant Grewal: Here we go, Mr. Speaker. The hon. member has quoted the United Nations convention. If the government does not listen to opposition members, or Canadians or families, there is the United Nations report which it should consider.

I had an opportunity to serve on the board of SOS Children's Villages. They have operated in 123 countries. They give families to orphan children. Those orphan siblings are kept together. I know how children feel when they are brought up in a family.

Children cannot speak for themselves but we, the politicians, should understand. Most of us in the House are parents or grandparents. We should articulate how this confusion by the justice minister is hampering the rights of children.

The government should understand that. It should look at the amendments which will be put forward in the justice committee when the bill is debated. This is not a partisan issue. It is about the future of our children.

The whole issue should focus on the needs of the children and the future of the children. I am sure that the government will listen to that. I urge the justice minister to act for the sake of the children.

● (1145)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Richard Marceau (Charlesbourg—Jacques-Cartier, BQ) Mr. Speaker, as you know, an MP's life can be a most interesting one. Some 45 minutes ago, I was in the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights, as was the parliamentary secretary I see here. We were discussing marriage, but marriage between same sex partners. Marriage there, and divorce here. Clearly these topics are of interest.

It is also a sign, however, to us all here in this House that what we do here will affect the personal everyday lives of the men and women of Quebec and of Canada.

When we address matters such as marriage and divorce, we must be very careful. We must reflect, listen, study. Unfortunately, with Bill C-22, the Minister of Justice seems to have brought forth a mouse. He has unfortunately not delivered on his promised revolution.

I would like to begin by reaffirming as strongly as possible the Bloc Quebecois' firm belief in the importance of the respective roles fathers and mothers play in the lives of their children, whether outside marriage, during a marriage, or after marriage breakdown.

Every parent, every father and mother has an important and essential role. This philosophical principle, which underlies every Bloc Quebecois intervention in the debate on Bill C-22, will guide us. This philosophical principle, which underscores the importance of the role of the father and the mother, will be present and is present in all our interventions in this bill.

You would not be surprised if I, as a Quebec sovereignist, said that the option preferred by the Bloc Quebecois is simply to repeal the Divorce Act and transfer it to Quebec.

In 1867, when the British North America Act, which is nothing more than an act passed by the British Parliament, was passed, anything that had to do with family law was left in the hands of the provinces under section 92 of the Constitution. The only exception was marriage and divorce, which, let us not forget, was basically for religious reasons.

Quebec was mostly Catholic and Canada and Ontario mostly Protestant and some feared that one of the provinces was imposing its views on the religious minority there.

Now that Quebec and Canada accept religious diversity and varying points of view, the federal government's appropriation of divorce and marriage, this tiny section of family law and civil law, no longer has its place. There is no longer any reason for this.

In this regard, the Bloc Quebecois is part of a long and illustrious tradition. For many decades, Union Nationale, Liberal and Parti Quebecois governments have all asked that family law be repatriated to Quebec. The Bloc Quebecois made this request again in 1998 when the joint committee on child custody submitted its report and it is a request we are reiterating today. We cannot be accused of inconsistency.

● (1150)

In the unfortunate event that the government rejects this option, changes would still need to be made to Bill C-22 introduced by the Minister of Justice.

I will simply address a few of the main points. When I met with Justice officials to discuss Bill C-22, they told me—unfortunately the briefing was conducted in English—that the words access and custody should be removed to effect what they called a conceptual shift in the approach to children's rights and to try to eliminate any notion of winner and loser in the debate on the custody of children.

Whether the words custody and access are removed or not, the fact remains that the child, boy or girl, will have to spend *x* number of days with mom and *y* number of days with dad. So, change wording as we may to call it something else, in actual fact, one parent will have the child for a period of time and the other will have him and her for another period of time.

All this to say that I seriously doubt that, in practice, the conceptual shift sought by the justice minister will be very meaningful.

Another aspect is the interest of the child. The minister's bill maintains the principle of the child's interest in determining custody and making various orders regarding the parents by setting out a number of criteria to take into consideration in determining what is in the interest of the child.

First, the interest of the child is already covered in subsection 16 (8) of the Divorce Act, as well as in section 514 of the Quebec Civil Code, with respect to separation from bed and board.

All the minister has done in connection with the best interests of the child has been to codify existing criteria from the jurisprudence. Decisions rendered across Canada were reviewed, and actions determined to have ensured the child's best interests were included in the legislation.

In the system of laws that governs us, jurisprudence is very important. All this to say that codifying jurisprudence hardly qualifies as new law. It does not change the law; it changes absolutely nothing. It only makes a cosmetic change to that part of the act. Once again, it reinforces the idea—and this was the point I was making at the beginning—that the government has brought forth a mouse.

There is another major problem with Bill C-22. The unified family courts. The government wants to make sure there is a unified family court in every province. Again I will remind the House that in 1998, when the joint committee released its report, the Bloc Quebecois opposed this idea and, surprise, surprise, it is still opposed to it now.

The way the federal government sees it, a unified court would bring every aspect of family law under the Quebec Superior Court, whose judges are appointed by the federal government.

In Quebec, courts that have jurisdiction over family law, except, of course, for marriage and divorce, come under the Quebec court, whose judges are appointed by the Quebec government.

We are opposed to the principle of a unified family court as planned by the federal government. If it persists in this direction, we will ask respectfully but firmly that it transfer to Quebec the money set aside to establish a family court in Quebec, so that Quebec may keep its distinct character in the way it manages family law, which, I remind members, is under provincial jurisdiction. Quebec is the only province with a civil code.

For all these reasons, the Bloc Quebecois will oppose Bill C-22, but it is our sincere hope that the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights will hold the broadest possible consultations, because whatever we decide in this House will have far reaching consequences for millions of Quebeckers and Canadians.

● (1155)

[*English*]

Mr. Roger Gallaway (Sarnia—Lambton, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to speak to the bill in general terms.

Bill C-22 is further evidence of why representative democracy is dead in terms of the Department of Justice. Section 18 of the British North America Act which gives this House the powers of representation of the public is dead. A motion was made recently by the Minister of Justice asking members of this place to waive their privileges, that is, section 18 of the British North America Act, our counterbalance to the enormous powers of the Crown as represented by the cabinet. Now we have a new evolution in that under Bill C-22.

Bill C-22 is a disgrace. It represents only the wishes and the views of perhaps seven lawyers in the Department of Justice. Bill C-22 is representative of nothing in this place. It is representative of nothing among the Canadian public, yet the justice minister brought it to this chamber.

In the 10 minutes allotted to me, I will quickly trace some of the history of this legislation.

In 1968 Canada's first Divorce Act was introduced. It introduced in some sense a no fault provision. In 1984 the act was amended and the then minister of justice in the Trudeau cabinet, Mr. MacGuigan, brought in some amendments to it. He introduced the concept of the best interest of the child, but, and this was a very traditional Liberal value, the best interest of the child included the joint financial obligations of the mother and the father to their children, and also the principle of maximum contact of the children with both parents.

The Divorce Act of 1984, or Bill C-10 as it was called ironically at that time, died on the Order Paper when Parliament dissolved in 1984. In 1985 the then minister of justice, Mr. Crosbie, brought in an act respecting divorce and corollary relief. He revamped and changed Bill C-10 but retained the best interest of the child concept and the concept of joint financial obligations toward joint and equal parenting.

I will flash forward to 1996 to Bill C-41 which introduced a revolutionary concept about child support. It put in place a regime where one parent, the non-custodial parent, would pay support and the custodial parent had no obligations. God bless those people in the other place because they resisted it. The bill passed on the very clear understanding that a joint committee of Parliament would be formed.

In 1997 that joint committee was formed by resolution of this House and the other place. That joint committee met throughout 1998 and made approximately 44 recommendations about fairness, about equality, about balance and most important, about putting two parents back into the life of a child when those parents divorced. I will read two pivotal recommendations of that committee.

Recommendation No. 5 of the joint committee report of December 9, 1998 states:

> This Committee recommends that the terms "custody and access" no longer be used in the Divorce Act and instead that the meaning of both terms be incorporated and received in the new term "shared parenting", which shall be taken to include all the meanings, rights, obligations, and common-law and statutory interpretations embodied previously in the terms "custody and access".

Recommendation No. 6 states:

> This Committee recommends that the Divorce Act be amended to repeal the definition of "custody" and to add a definition of "shared parenting" that reflects the meaning ascribed to that term by this Committee.

That is all rather interesting. At the same time, a massive public shift of opinion occurred.

A Compas poll showed that 89% of Canadians believed the stress of divorce was more severe than a generation ago, and that 70% of men and women said the courts do not pay enough attention to the needs of children.

● (1200)

In that same poll 62% of men and women said that they feel the courts pay too little attention to the needs of fathers and 80% of Canadians believed that the children of divorce must maintain ongoing relationships with their non-custodial parents. Also 65% of Canadians said that they feel it is a priority that the government should protect the rights of children to relationships with their non-custodial parents and that no custodial parent should be allowed to bar that access.

An Angus Reid poll on May 25, 1998 in the *Globe and Mail* said that 71% of residents of Ontario believe a woman's child support should be withheld if access is denied. Also it said that Ontarians are equally split as to whether or not jail terms are appropriate for access denial.

The end result was that in May 1999 the justice minister responded to the special joint committee. I quote from "Government of Canada Strategy for Reform" the Government of Canada's response to the report of the Special Joint Committee on Child Custody and Access:

> The Government of Canada is committed to responding to the issues identified by the CommitteeReport. The Special Joint Committee Report's key themes, concerns and recommendationsprovide a foundation for developing a strategy for reforming the policy and legislative frameworkthat deals with the impact of divorce on Canadian children.

On October 12, 1999 the throne speech said "it will work to reform family law and strengthen supports provided to families".

With respect to the throne speech of January 30, 2001, at page 8 of the Senate Debates it states:

> The government will work with its partners on modernizing the laws for child support, custody and access, to ensure that these work in the best interests of children in cases of family breakdown.

On September 30, 2002 the throne speech said at page 4:

> [The government] will also reform family law, putting greater emphasis on the best interests of the child...and ensure that appropriate child and family services are available.

What do we get out of all of that? What does this all mean? It means that in December last year, the justice minister tabled Bill C-22 which reflects nothing. It is not reflective of anything that three committees of Parliament have said ought to be done. It does not reflect anything that Canadians told the committee. It reflects nothing that polls across the country have shown.

A justice minister, who had been the justice minister for three months, arrived and said "I know more. I know better. I will tell you what is in the best interests of children and it is this thing I call Bill C-22".

The end result is that we are now living in a place where the executive branch has given to the House a bill which reflects only the wishes of the so-called experts in the Department of Justice. We have been given a bill which flies in the face of everything this place stands for in terms of representative democracy. The bill is the status quo or less. The bill does not address children.

The bill brings in a new concept which is turning the Divorce Act into the form of a mini criminal code. It introduces something called domestic violence into the Divorce Act.

Since when did a civil act become a criminal act? Since when did we start passing laws in this place that would criminalize allegations? Since when did we say to half the population, "You have no place in the life of your children because you have divorced and we will allow, not Parliament which has an obligation to protect children, but judges to decide".

This will continue to foment dissent and great bitterness. Most tragically, we will continue to see a generation of children of divorce who only know one parent, who only know one family and who will be raised under the guise of revolution if we allow the bill to pass. That is why members of this chamber must do what is best for the children of this country, not what is best for a justice minister or his bureaucrats. We must stand and say at second reading, no, we will not accept this.

● (1205)

Mr. Rick Borotsik (Brandon—Souris, PC): Mr. Speaker, at the outset I must thank the member for Sarnia—Lambton for the non-partisan position taken on a piece of legislation that is so vital and important to the House and to the many people it affects. The member for Sarnia—Lambton always has a spot over here if he wishes to pursue the government the way he has.

Believe me, I hope beyond hope there are more members on the Liberal backbenches who will look seriously at this legislation, dissect it and see what it is doing or not doing for what I consider to be one of the most serious issues facing us as a society today. There are pieces of legislation that come before us, in fact we have five or six today, that deal with very important issues. In my opinion, this is without question the most important issue that will be dealt with in the House of Commons.

I am very fortunate and very happy that I have never had any personal experience in dealing with divorce. However, if members looked within their own personal lives, they would find someone among their family or friends who has experienced divorce. It is one of the most acrimonious circumstances anyone could possibly face.

Bill C-22 is supposed to put into place legislation that would allow this particular circumstance, divorce, to take place between two people with some protections.

The history lesson by the member for Sarnia—Lambton was wonderful. As was mentioned earlier, there was a special joint committee which issued the wonderful report "For the Sake of the Children". It had 48 recommendations which, if the House wanted to follow, would put into place legislation that would deal with the singular issue that it attempted to do, and that was for the sake of the children, protection for the children.

Some of the 48 recommendations have been implemented. I will not be as strongly opposed to the legislation as the member for Sarnia—Lambton. Some have been included in the legislation. However, there are approximately 13 recommendations, very important and strong, absolutely stand-alone recommendations that have not been included and because of that, the legislation has faults. The legislation is not the right piece of legislation to go forward.

There are two issues. First, in any kind of divorce proceeding, we recognize that there will be acrimony. Once people have reached that point in a marriage, there will be acrimony. There will be, unfortunately, too many things that will not be negotiable between a husband and a wife. Unfortunately there has to be a mediator. There has to be legislation put into place to mediate that. Unfortunately as well, when people have reached that point in a marriage, it is usually most detrimental to the children of the marriage.

In "For the Sake of the Children" there are two issues. One is shared parenting. This is a simple concept. When two people are involved in a marriage and from that marriage come children, then in my opinion and certainly in the opinion of the committee and the opinion of the majority of Canadians, both parents must and still have a need for the opportunity to develop those children throughout their childhood. They must have access. There must be shared parenting.

The Minister of Justice does not like the term "shared parenting" and he does not like the terms "custody" and "access". The term he will be putting in is "parenting orders". A word is only a word. Shared parenting means that each individual parent has the right and the responsibility to raise the children.

The committee also said that as part of shared parenting there should be a parenting plan. What a great idea. A parenting plan would be negotiated and worked out between two adults which would allow the children to have as close to a normal upbringing as they could possibly have. But no, that is not dealt with in this legislation.

● (1210)

Instead, as was mentioned, they go off to the courts to decide what is going to happen with joint custody and what is going to happen with sole custody. For the sake of the children, it is necessary to have a mandatory piece of legislation which states that in divorce proceedings it is imperative that the first thing is to say that the children are going to have shared parenting, that they are going to have equal access to both parents. That is the equality and that is the fairness that should be developed in this act.

The second issue, needless to say, is financial, obviously whether there is going to be spousal support, child support, or a financial contribution from one partner to another. In general terms it should not be a gender thing. There should be fairness. There should in fact be a simple, basic premise which states that one member of the marriage should not be a beneficiary to the detriment of the other. One member of that duo should not receive substantial financial support to the detriment of another and have his or her lifestyle change so dramatically that he or she cannot cope.

I have reams and reams of the information provided to us as members of Parliament which speaks of the tragedies with respect to so much being demanded of one parent by the courts that the individual just could not cope. When that individual could not cope, unfortunately in some cases it resulted in suicide, and this is not fearmongering, this is a reality. This is an issue we have to deal with and it can be dealt with in fairness and equity in a piece of legislation.

I am disappointed that the Minister of Justice would bring forward this bill without more thought being given to it, without the ability to put into place a piece of legislation that is going to allow divorce to happen in a much fairer and more equitable fashion.

The issue here is not to try to stop the divorce. We recognize that in our society today there are those who, in their own judgment, do not wish to be a married couple. That is a reality. The reality is there. What we must do as politicians and legislators is make sure that the rules are put in place to make this happen in the most fair and equitable way possible.

As I said, there are two issues. One of them is shared parenting and making sure that there is equal access to children. I cannot think of anything worse than being the father of children and not being able to have access to those children, for whatever reason but in this particular case divorce. As part of that, there has to be the opportunity for access for the extended family. We can talk about rights, whether that be rights for grandparents, and we also know that now we have extended families that in fact should have access, either to grandchildren or to nieces and nephews. That has to be protected in this act.

The other issue is support. There has to be fairness with respect to support, and from both parents, from both sides of the equation.

We will see this legislation go forward to committee. I do not think the member for Sarnia—Lambton has in fact convinced the members of his party to stop it at this level. I wish he could, and I hope he can, but if he cannot it is going back to committee. The only hope and wish I have is that members of all parties, and this is not partisan nor should it be, simply listen with an open mind as to how the legislation must be changed, not should be or could be but must be, changed for the sake of the children.

That is what it is about. It is for the children who are going to be growing up in a home divided, but that home divided does not necessarily have to be an acrimonious home. It does not necessarily have to be a home that is going to have one winner and one loser in a relationship. In fact, that is the absolute worst thing that could possibly happen to children growing up in a family.

● (1215)

From my party's perspective, we will be at the table at the justice committee. We will be putting forward what we consider to be the necessary amendments to make this legislation so much better. Or perhaps we can start from scratch, by pulling the legislation altogether, and try to put into place what is best for the children.

Mr. Deepak Obhrai (Calgary East, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure for me to rise and speak on Bill C-22, the Divorce Act amendments.

First I would like to say that my colleague from Prince George—Peace River has taken the initiative to ensure that the voices of Canadians and everybody were heard when the bill was being formulated and will be heard as it is going to be formulated when it goes to the committee.

I have listened with interest to my colleague from the Liberal side as well as my colleague from the Progressive Conservative side. Both have articulated a very good point, especially the Liberal member from Sarnia when he said that the bill seems to have been drafted by the lawyers in the justice department without major input from the people of Canada, which would be through the House of Commons. Therefore I thought it was important for me to stand up and speak on the bill.

Why do I think it is important? Let me start by saying that for the last three to four years I have received representations in my office from frustrated people who are in divorce proceedings, whose marriage, for whatever reason, has broken down. They have come to my office and have expressed frustration about the Divorce Act and about the way the courts have acted and have passed judgment.

I had a town hall meeting where I wanted to discuss the issues that were in front of Parliament. I was surprised at the number of grandparents who came, pleading that we do something so that grandparents will have access to the children. At the end of the day, grandparents do have a right to their grandchildren.

In regard to these proceedings, we have a lot of experience. We have seen what happened in the past. We know that on many occasions when divorce proceedings take place it is not harmonious. It is a split that leaves bitter feelings. These feelings tend to be used against the children, who become pawns for revenge purposes, regrettably. As many members will know, even in the last year or so in Calgary we have had cases where parents have taken the lives of small children so they could get revenge against the other partner. What a tragedy, Mr. Speaker.

This calls for Parliament, for the people, to look at this issue, because divorce is on the rise. It is a fact of life. There are single parents out there and we need to listen to them and address this issue, because it is there. It is not going to go away. It is not going to be hidden under the carpet. If we are going to leave it to the unelected officials, to the courts, to create the rules or regulations or laws for this, then we are doing a huge disservice to Canadians.

During election 2000 when I went door knocking, I was stunned and amazed at how many times I met single mothers with children. They had returned home to stay with their parents. In talking to them, I heard their frustration with trying to raise the children by themselves. If statistics are anything to go by, for the majority of children who live in poverty it is because of the single parent. Due to the breakup of marriages, single parenting is what is sending children into poverty.

In the budget the government has said it is going to spend so much money for child poverty. Fair enough. Agreed. It is a good point, but the fact of the matter is that we should go to the root cause one step behind this, to where it is coming from. It is coming from single parenting.

● (1220)

How do we address the issue? It goes back to the divorce cases. We need to look at the divorce case issue and come up with not what the bureaucrats or lawyers are trying to do but with what is really out there, what is really happening, where the cracks are that we need to solve. There are the rights of grandparents and shared parenting.

What if we give direction to the courts to say we want shared parenting because it is the responsibility of both? Why should one parent be put on the other side and carry the burden while the other parent feels he cannot participate and feels neglected in society? There have been recent cases of this in Alberta, where revenge has been taken and the poor children have even lost their lives.

The question here is that it is for the sake of the children. The parents may decide they want to be separate and to go ahead with their own lives, and so be it, they make the decision, but we have to take into account what the children need. They love their children. We all use the same words, interestingly, and we all say "for the sake of children", but what and how?

When the bill goes back to committee hopefully people will come and offer presentations and will fight to make sure that there is an equitable share for both parents in raising the children. That is good in the long term for society and it is good for us because we are investing in our children, the long term future of this country.

● (1225)

The Deputy Speaker: Is the House ready for the question?

Some hon. members: Question.

The Deputy Speaker: The question is on the motion. Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

The Deputy Speaker: All those in favour of the motion will please say yea.

Some hon. members: Yea.

The Deputy Speaker: All those opposed will please say nay.

Some hon. members: Nay.

The Deputy Speaker: In my opinion the yeas have it.

And more than five members having risen:

The Deputy Speaker: Call in the members.

And the bells having rung:

Ms. Marlene Catterall: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. I ask that a recorded division on the proposed motion be deferred until Tuesday at the end of government orders.

The Deputy Speaker: Is there unanimous consent to defer the division until Tuesday at the end of government orders?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

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YUKON ENVIRONMENTAL AND SOCIO-ECONOMIC ASSESSMENT ACT

The House proceeded to the consideration of Bill C-2, an act to establish a process for assessing the environmental and socio-economic effects of certain activities in Yukon, as reported (with amendment) from the committee.

SPEAKER'S RULING

The Deputy Speaker: There is one motion in amendment standing on the Notice Paper for the report stage of Bill C-2. Motion No. 1 will be debated and voted upon.

MOTIONS IN AMENDMENT

Hon. David Kilgour (for the Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development) moved:

That Bill C-2 be amended by deleting subclause 122(2).

Mr. John Finlay (Oxford, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the purpose of the amendment as was read was to remove subclause 122(2) of the bill.

While I believe in the object that the standing committee was hoping to achieve with their amendment to the clause, the problems with the amendment can be addressed and the underlying objective can be adequately accommodated through the original bill clause and existing processes. I will try to explain why.

The standing committee amendment to clause 122 has a number of deficiencies that would prove problematic.

Perhaps principal among these is the fact that the committee's amendment does not take into account that there is a second regulation making provision in the bill in subclause 47(1). It is under this provision that the project regulations would be made and hon. members should know that these regulations are the ones that will be of the most interest to the public and industry and environmental interest groups.

Second, the proposed new subclause 122(2) does not provide for a role for the other place. Under current practice, regulations are reviewed by the Standing Joint Committee on Scrutiny of Regulations, a committee of both the House and the other place. We believe this is appropriate and should be maintained for regulations made under Bill C-2.

The amendment proposed by the standing committee could also prove problematic as it names a specific standing committee in a statute. As the names and functions of House committees could change over time, the provision could be rendered ineffective unless there was an amendment to the bill.

I would like to spend a few minutes explaining why I believe the bill does not require the amendment suggested by the committee to provide opportunities for public involvement in the regulatory process under the bill.

First, I would like to remind hon. members of one of the key features of the bill, referred to at length during the second reading debate in the House: extensive consultations on the bill.

The fact is that there have already been considerable consultations conducted regarding what the public and interest groups think should be included in the two key areas of regulations under the bill, and that is those that establish what activities are subject to assessment and regulations and those establishing time lines within which decisions must be made.

In addition to those consultations that have already occurred, I note that clause 122 of the bill already requires the minister to consult with the government of Yukon and all Yukon first nations prior to making regulations. These consultations have also been ongoing for some time now. I am confident that when these regulations are drafted, consideration of all this input will be reflected.

I would also like to remind hon. members that before regulations are finalized they are pre-published in the *Canada Gazette* with an opportunity for public review and comment on them. This provides yet another opportunity for public and interest group input to these regulations.

Finally, these regulations will be reviewed by the Standing Joint Committee on the Scrutiny of Regulations. As hon. members know, this is a joint committee of the House and the other place. The addition of subclause 122(2) would, therefore, only serve to duplicate existing processes for this place, while providing no role for the other place.

I believe that hon. members can be confident that there will be numerous opportunities for input by the public and interest groups, the Yukon government and first nations into the development of all regulations under the bill. Further, including subclause 122(2) would only be problematic and serve to duplicate existing processes. I also believe that all hon. members recognize these problems and will join me in supporting the motion to remove subclause 122(2) of the bill.

● (1230)

The Deputy Speaker: Is the House ready for the question?

Some hon. members: Question.

The Deputy Speaker: The question is on Motion No. 1. Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

The Deputy Speaker: All those in favour of the motion will please say yea.

Some hon. members: Yea.

The Deputy Speaker: All those opposed will please say nay.

Some hon. members: Nay.

The Deputy Speaker: In my opinion the yeas have it.

And more than five members having risen:

The Deputy Speaker: Call in the members.

And the bells having rung:

The Deputy Speaker: Accordingly, the vote is deferred until tomorrow.

Ms. Marlene Catterall: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. I think you would find consent in the House to further defer the vote until Tuesday next week at the end of government orders.

The Deputy Speaker: Is there unanimous consent to defer the division until Tuesday at the end of government orders?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

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LOBBYISTS REGISTRATION ACT

The House proceeded to the consideration of Bill C-15, an act to amend the Lobbyists Registration Act, as reported (without amendment) from the committee.

SPEAKERS RULING

The Deputy Speaker: There are three motions in amendment standing on the Notice Paper for the report stage of Bill C-15.

[*Translation*]

Motions Nos. 1 to 3 will be grouped for debate. The voting patterns for the motions are available at the Table.

[*English*]

I shall now propose Motions Nos. 1 to 3 to the House.

● (1235)

MOTIONS IN AMENDMENT

Mr. John Bryden (Ancaster—Dundas—Flamborough—Aldershot, Lib.) moved:

Motion No. 1

That Bill C-15, in Clause 7, be amended by adding after line 26 on page 8 the following:

"(h.3) if any employee named in the return is a former public office holder, a description of the offices held;"

Motion No. 2

That Bill C-15, in Clause 7, be amended by adding after line 26 on page 8 the following:

"(h.4) if any employee named in the return is a former public office holder, the names of the public office holders with whom the employee intends to communicate;"

Motion No. 3

That Bill C-15, in Clause 7, be amended by adding after line 40 on page 9 the following:

"(3.1) The definition "employee" in subsection 7(6) of the Act is replaced by the following:

"employee" includes any person who is compensated for the performance of the duties referred to in paragraph (1)(a);"

He said: Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure to rise to speak to these amendments to Bill C-15.

Bill C-15 is a comprehensive bill that upgrades and modernizes the Lobbyists Registration Act, a very important item of legislation that ensures accountability and transparency in the lobbying process. I have been involved in this legislation from time to time since its review in 1995, and while I certainly applaud the intent of the legislation, both its original intent and the legislation in its amended form under Bill C-15, I have long felt that there was an omission in the legislation. The motions I proposed are a first step to correcting those omissions.

The Lobbyists Registration Act as it stands, both now and with the Bill C-15 amendments, is primarily directed toward setting up a regime of transparency for the lobbyists. What happens is that various types of lobbyists are required to register with the lobbyists registrar, to identify themselves by company, by name, by individuals, and to identify the government department they intend to lobby.

That is all very well and good, but the reality is that for really effective transparency, what the public needs to know, what the public needs to have access to is not just who the lobbyists are but specifically who the lobbyists are lobbying.

At various times when this bill has been before committee, I have argued that the government should amend the legislation in such a way that bureaucrats, who are the targets of lobbyists, should be required to keep logs to indicate who has been lobbying them.

I have had a very difficult experience with the lack of this provision in fairly recent times. The House knows that I am a very great champion of the Access to Information Act, and freedom of information in general, and have long been concerned about the inadequacies of that legislation. However I had occasion to use that access to information legislation to do background on the animal cruelty bill that was before the House, and is now before the Senate.

I wanted to determine how certain policies were developed by the justice department that appeared in that legislation and where they came from with respect to the various groups that were obviously lobbying government. I had some real concerns because in its original form, the animal cruelty bill, which in the previous Parliament was called Bill C-17, had some very inappropriate and extreme measures slanted toward the animal rights movement and the extreme end of the animal rights movement, I would have said. This prompted me to try to determine how it came that the government should come up with policy that seemed to go toward the animal rights movement rather than to the animal management groups, like the farmers' groups and various other organizations that use animals.

When I tried to get this information, I certainly found who the lobbyists were. One of the lobby groups for instance was the International Fund for Animal Welfare. Another lobby group that was consulted was People for the Ethical Treatment of Animals. Members in the House will realize that both these groups are known to be very extreme in their approach to animal rights and often are on collision courses with other more moderate groups that use animals either in a clinical context for research or in a farm context.

What I was unable to find and what I would have really liked to have known was who these lobbyist organizations actually made contact with. Of course under the existing legislation it is impossible to determine that.

● (1240)

The reason that it is so important is not whether these organizations approached the Deputy Minister of Justice or some very high ranking official. What we really want to know is whether these lobbyist organizations approached middle level people, the invisible people who routinely write policy for government and who may be susceptible to the blandishments of skilled lobbyist.

There is another factor. In my riding I encountered complaints from organizations and individuals who found themselves in competition for government contracts. They complained that they lost the contract because another lobbyist organization had the advantage of a former officeholder, somebody who had been working in the department not many years earlier and now had left the department and was working for a lobbyist.

This raises a very delicate issue of fairness. We want an even playing field for anyone who is dealing with the government. We have no objection to lobbyists lobbying the government but we have to worry if people are trying to obtain government contracts or to access government programs and those people ought to have the advantage of knowing whether their lobbyist competitors have the advantage of a former officeholder. As it sits right now in the legislation, there is no way of anyone knowing that.

The further problem is that lobbying is a multimillion dollar industry in Ottawa. We know it to be so. The problem is that what no one knows in this business of lobbying is how extensively spread are the former officeholders. We are not talking about necessarily former ministers of the crown. We are talking about people who could be former deputy minsters or assistant deputy ministers. It goes on and on down through the various levels of government where we might have somebody who was a purchasing agent for a government department or somebody in a government department who recommended purchases who has quit the department and who now works for a lobbyist. These are the things we cannot see. These are the things that we need to see.

What the first motion would do is it would require lobbyists, when they register, to indicate whether or not they were a former officeholder by indicating what roles they performed in the federal government.

I would suggest that this is a very simple thing to do. Once a person has registered as a former officeholder with the lobbyist registrar that would be permanently on the record and would be easily accessible for many times.

One might argue that this something that should be put on the record indefinitely. I suggest that yes, indeed it should be put on the record indefinitely because I think the public has the right to know this.

The second motion would require these former officerholders to indicate who the individual is that they are lobbying.

I would have preferred the bureaucracy keeping logs of when they are lobbied. We would get that information through the Access to Information Act. This is another way of accomplishing the same thing.

I would suggest that the registrar can define the parameters, but I see nothing wrong with former officeholders indicating who they are lobbying, because obviously it is going to be somebody who is a former friend, somebody who is a former contact, and lobbying each time. It would not stop the process of the lobbyists. It would merely indicate, for the benefit of those of us who ought to know, who it is in the government and at what level is being lobbied on any particular issue, especially whether that person is being lobbied by a former officeholder.

The third motion merely sorts out an inadequacy in the legislation. It specifically defines an employee in terms of the description of the duties of a lobbyist in section 7. It is something that ought to have been in the original legislation, and I have attempted to correct it on behalf of the government.

● (1245)

Mr. James Rajotte (Edmonton Southwest, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, I want to begin by commending my hon. colleague for his efforts, not only on this legislation but I think in general he has been very concerned about the issue of influence and the issues of accountability and transparency. I see his motions in the spirit of that.

We do see some merit in the three motions proposed today. I will go over each of them generally and then each of them in particular.

The motions aim at revealing the presence of connections between former public officeholders turned lobbyists and the departments where they previously served or had contact.

As an initial point, it is worth noting that there already exists in the Conflict of Interest and Post-Employment Code for Former Public Office Holders, time based prohibitions on former public officeholders lobbying back the departments where they worked. I know this is not in any specific motion but is worth noting. These amendments appear to be aiming a spotlight on those friendly relationships that might exist between former and current public officeholders and which might lead to undue influence.

I will turn specifically now to the three amendments before us today.

Motion No. 1 would apply to in house lobbyists employed by corporations and organizations. A corporation or organization is required to make a filing if the corporation or organization employs one or more persons who engage in lobbying, for example, communicating with public officeholders with respect to certain types of public business. This is listed in clause 7(1) and the aggregated time spent by all the employees constitutes a significant part, for example 20%, of the duties of one employee or would constitute a significant part of the duties if they were performed by only one employee.

Motion No. 1 would add to the information that must be disclosed by the corporation or organization to include disclosing the name of any employee engaged in lobbying activities who is a former public officeholder, as well as indicating what office they formerly held. The purpose of the motion, as we can determine, is to permit the public to identify those individuals who have greater influence as a lobbyist as a result of having held public office.

While the proposed motion would broaden the disclosure requirements, in our view this addition would appear to be not too onerous. Clause 7(3) already requires that organizations and corporations name all employees who do any lobbying. In addition, corporations must also name the senior officers of the corporation.

Bill C-15 would not require identifying those individuals as former public officeholders or the office that they held. The identity of public officeholders is of course public information and members of the public could, with some research, find out that information. They could make this connection. Still, having this information set out in the registry would save them research time.

It is my intention to support the first motion.

The second motion would require any former public officeholders turned lobbyists to name the particular public officeholder with whom they intended to communicate. The motion would require former public officeholders to name the person who is, so to speak, on the inside, whom they are attempting to influence. In our view this would represent a significant departure from the current approach of the act which requires only that the department itself be named without naming individuals.

In my view this does present some conceptual problems. Former public officeholders would have to know the identity of the person to whom they intended to speak before initiating contact. One thing that the member may want to clarify is what would happen if the former public officeholder went to speak to someone in the department and was then referred to someone else? How would this motion deal with that type of situation? From a practical point of view, could we not get around the motion by simply setting up an intermediary? How would the motion prevent public officeholders from simply setting up an intermediary between the person with whom they actually wanted to talk? How would the motion deal with that type of situation?

● (1250)

During the committee's review of the act it was generally expressed by the witnesses that they wanted to maintain as much contact with departments, bureaucrats, officials, members of Parliament and policymakers without creating a chill, if they could. In other words, they wanted a lobbyist registration system that was transparent and accountable without creating a chill.

In my view, while the idea of bill disclosure has some merits, I feel that with the unanswered problems that I posed, as well as with the overall concern of creating a chill, it is my intention to not support the second motion.

The third proposed motion would change the definition of "employee". In the current act an employee includes an officer who is compensated for the performance of his or her duties. The motion would change the definition to any person who is compensated for the performance of his or her duties referred to in paragraph 1(a). The duties referred to in paragraph 7(1)(a) are what are commonly known as lobbying activities. The purpose of this is to expand the definition of "employee" for organizations and corporations to include not only officers but any person who lobbies. This would appear to aim at organizations and corporations that try to avoid registration by not naming the lobbyist as an officer.

I have to admit that initially I did not see much of a problem with this when I reviewed the legislation. However I do not think it is a harmful motion and therefore I would certainly offer my support to the third motion.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Mario Laframboise (Argenteuil—Papineau—Mirabel, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to address Bill C-15, an act to amend the Lobbyists Registration Act.

The Bloc Quebecois will support the amendments, but we do not support the act as introduced by the Liberal government. We are opposed to it, because this legislation does not give more teeth to the rules governing lobbyists. There is nothing in the bill to compel lobbyists to mention the type of public officials they meet, the type of work they are involved in, and the money paid for their services. Moreover, lobbyists are not required to disclose the amounts of money that they spend while lobbying.

This makes me wonder why Parliament is now discussing the issue of lobbyists. The reason is simple.

The work of parliamentarians has been impeded. The role of parliamentarians is no longer to listen to the public. Their role, particularly for members of the Liberal Party of Canada, is no longer to listen to those who represent their communities and who come to Parliament Hill to discuss issues with them. No, this is too complicated; they have to meet too many people and they have to deal with too many problems.

Since the Liberal Party of Canada has been in power, it has been holding discussions with representatives of influential companies and with influential people representing influential groups. My colleague from Rivière-des-Mille-Îles has seen the Boisbriand GM plant close. The Liberal government is not here to listen to representations and grievances from the GM workers at Boisbriand. No, it is here to be lobbied by GM Canada. That is the reality. That is the way things work.

Today we are discussing lobbyists. My colleague from Berthier—Montcalm is currently experiencing problems in agriculture in his riding. Everywhere in Canada there are serious problems in agriculture. But they are not listening to the Union des producteurs agricoles du Québec in Berthier—Montcalm. They are listening to the powerful lobbyists. That is what they are doing. There are utterly ignoring what the workers' representatives have to say.

Often, in agriculture, where international relations are concerned, in the dairy industry for instance, Canada will sacrifice Quebec's dairy producers. It will put supply management, which is so staunchly supported by all agricultural producers in Quebec, on the table. In this case, the lobby is the Government of Canada.

Today we are discussing a bill on lobbyist registration. Lobbying has now become a tradition. To gain the Liberal government's ear, one has to go through middlemen. That is what the bill we have before us is all about, dealing with middlemen. That is a harsh reality for the Quebeckers and Canadians who are listening to us.

The opposition parties, including the Bloc Quebecois, are the ones pressuring the government. We have not stopped harassing the government about the agricultural question. My colleagues from Rivière-des-Mille-Îles and from Laurentides continue to do the same about the GM plant in Boisbriand. They constantly demand that the government get to work to keep the only auto plant in Quebec open.

This is a plant in the region, in the country, of Quebec. One of the biggest producers of aluminum and magnesium in the world is unable to keep an auto plant operating, and why? Because the industry lobby is pro-Ontario. That is the situation.

The Liberal members of this House, the ministers responsible, including the Minister responsible for the Economic Development Agency of Canada for the Regions of Quebec, those with responsibility for Quebec, are the ones who come to give us the bad news.

● (1255)

When the GM plant in Boisbriand closed, the minister himself said, after a meeting with GM Canada lobbyists, "That's it. It's over. There is nothing we can do".

Now, he is Minister of Justice. He is a member from Quebec and he told Quebeckers that, in the end, the GM lobbyists won and that the GM plant in Boisbriand would be closed. The same thing will happen with agriculture.

I would encourage my colleague from Berthier—Montcalm to keep up his good work, and not to let up in badgering the Liberal government here in the House and to defend supply management in Quebec's dairy industry. It does exist.

Quebec farmers have set up a supply management system in the dairy industry that is unique. It ensures revenues for farmers that allow the industry to thrive. This is not an industry that is getting rich off the backs of the people; but they do make a decent living.

Once again, the Liberal Party, through the Minister for International Trade, will negotiate all kinds of measures that could threaten Quebec's supply management system. Once again, this government is bowing to pressure from multinational corporations. In agriculture, it is under pressure from processors, because they are the ones, in the end, who want to be able to do as they please with the industry, to the detriment of farmers. That is the reality.

So, once again, the lobby for dairy products processors is more important than the representatives of those who work in the industry. That is what happened with the GM plant in Boisbriand, and that is what will happen with the Union des producteurs agricoles, supply management in agriculture and supply management in the dairy industry.

Obviously, we will support any amendments to limit the role of lobbyists as much as possible, to provide transparency regarding their work, and to limit their election campaign contributions to the ruling party. That is the reality.

So, we will support amendments to limit as much as possible the work of lobbyists. However, you will understand that we are against this bill, which does not go far enough and which should likely never have been drafted.

As a matter of fact, representatives of every association and group can meet members of Parliament. Bloc Quebecois members' office doors are always open. Why do we need lobbyists? Because the office doors of Liberal members and ministers, of the government in power, are not open to Quebeckers and Canadians. They are open to lobbyists who have money to dole out. That is the reality.

You will have understood that every amendment and every proposal made by the Bloc Quebecois at report stage was defeated in committee. Naturally, Liberal members succeeded in defeating every suggestion by the Bloc Quebecois to try once more to place stricter controls on lobbyists' activities. Our proposals were defeated at report stage. Of course, the few amendments moved by our colleagues are important, and we thank them, but those amendments do not go far enough to put controls on the political structure.

You will have understood it is nothing but smoke and mirrors. Lobbying is a political structure that parallels everything members do, both Liberal members and members from the other parties in the House. Ministers would rather deal with lobbyists than with members, irrespective of their ridings or political allegiance. That is the reality.

People are confused because the most influential lobbyists on the Hill should be the members of this House. It is our role; our job is to stand up for our constituents, various associations and groups.

Again the problem is that the few members who are ministers find there are too many people to listen to. They prefer dealing with a few so-called experts in fields in which their expertise definitely has more to do with the money they can give to campaign funds than with the quality of the work they can do. That is the reality.

The hon. member for Rivière-des-Mille-Îles experienced this when the GM plant in Boisbriand closed down. The hon. member for Laurentides also experienced this. And the hon. member for Berthier —Montcalm is experiencing it with agriculture. It is difficult to defend the interests of Quebec farmers when in Canada efforts are being made to eliminate supply management and wipe out the work of an entire generation of farmers in an attempt to bring the standards down to what they currently are in Canada. Naturally, not all provinces are as far ahead as Quebec in terms of management.

● (1300)

However, care should be taken not to penalize Quebec farmers. We would not want either to penalize those processors who are trying not only to expand plants but, more importantly, to increase quarterly profits for their shareholders.

So, all we in this House wish is for workers, whether in the automotive industry or in agriculture, to be able to earn a decent living in this state known as Canada and in the country of Quebec.

Mr. Serge Marcil (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Industry, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would also like to thank the member for Ancaster—Dundas—Flamborough—Aldershot for the work he has done since he has joined this House, especially in this matter that is so close to his heart. I would also like to thank all the members of the Standing Committee on Industry, for their particular work in improving, fine-tuning and clarifying the Lobbyists Registration Act.

Incidentally, this is the bill which was sent back to committee, and which is now going through second reading. It is currently one of the most progressive pieces of legislation in the world. There is no lobbyist legislation that goes as far as the Canadian legislation in terms of returns and registration obligations.

Let us come back to the three motions introduced by my hon. colleague. I would like to address each of them in turn. The Lobbyists Registration Act contains a very general definition of the expression "public office holder". This definition includes public servants, full- or part-time Governors in Council, members of the House of Commons and the Senate and their staff, members of the Canadian Armed Forces, and members of the RCMP.

This motion is not limited in time and is therefore very broad in scope. It would create a serious administrative burden. It could hinder the ability of former public office holders to find a job.

It is difficult to see how such a general measure would protect public interest. The government has already imposed post-employment requirements that are designed to protect public interest by limiting the companies where former public office holders can work, and the departments or agencies which they can lobby. These rules are found in the Conflict of Interest and Post-Employment Code for Public Office Holders and the Conflict of Interest and Post-Employment Code for the Public Service.

Briefly, these rules prevent public office holders, including senior public servants, from accepting a job or contract with a company with whom they had official dealings of a direct and significant nature during their last year in office. They also prevent these individuals from lobbying a minister or an organization with whom they had official dealings of a direct and significant nature during their last year in office. The transition period is one year in both cases; it is two years for ministers.

As to the second motion, since lobbying is the act of communicating with a public office holder, the former public office holders would be required to make a list of all persons with whom they communicated in the government other than for parliamentary business, the application or interpretation of an act or regulation, or a request for information.

It is presumed that if the registration does not specify the person with whom the former public office holder communicated, the registration must be modified after the communication has taken place.

The House Standing Committee on Industry, Science and Technology did not deal with the specific matter of former public office holders during its consideration of the Lobbyists Registration Act in 2001, but it formulated recommendation No. 16, which is found in the well-known report:

> The Committee does not recommend that the Act be amended in order to create a requirement that the names of individuals who have been lobbied be disclosed in the lobbyists registry.

The committee felt that such a measure would not significantly improve transparency and could in fact prevent open communication between public office holders and lobbyists. It also concluded that such a requirement would significantly increase the cost of compliance audit and implementation. The same conclusions apply to the motion.

This motion would create a major administrative burden. It could also adversely affect the ability of former public office holders to find a job. It is difficult to see how such a broad measure would protect the public interest. So, the comments are the same as for Motion No. 1.

● (1305)

Motion No. 3 would have the effect of broadening the scope of the definition of "employee" to include all employees, including support staff. The current definition of "employee" includes officers.

In 1996, when the Lobbyists Registration Act was last amended, it was decided to group together the requirements relating to the registration of people who could be expected to be responsible for lobbying activities in an organization or corporation.

Extending the scope of these requirements to include support staff would simply increase the administrative burden, without improving transparency as regards the lobbying goals of the organization or corporation.

[*English*]

The Deputy Speaker: Is the House ready for the question?

Some hon. members: Question.

The Deputy Speaker: The question is on Motion No. 1. Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

The Deputy Speaker: All those in favour of the motion will please say yea.

Some hon. members: Yea.

The Deputy Speaker: All those opposed will please say nay.

Some hon. members: Nay.

The Deputy Speaker: In my opinion the yeas have it.

And more than five members having risen:

The Deputy Speaker: The recorded division on the motion stands deferred. The recorded division will also apply to Motion No. 2

● (1310)

[*Translation*]

The question is on Motion No. 3. Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

The Deputy Speaker: All those in favour of the motion will please say yea.

Some hon. members: Yea.

The Deputy Speaker: All those opposed will please say nay.

Some hon. members: Nay.

The Deputy Speaker: In my opinion the yeas have it.

And more than five members having risen:

The Deputy Speaker: The recorded division on the motion stands deferred.

[*English*]

The House will now proceed to the taking of the deferred recorded division at the report stage of the bill.

Call in the members.

[*Translation*]

And the bells having rung:

The Deputy Speaker: The recorded division on the motion stands deferred until Monday, at the end of the time provided for government orders.

Mr. Jacques Saada: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. I believe there is unanimous consent for the recorded division to be further deferred until Tuesday, at the end of government orders.

[*English*]

The Deputy Speaker: Is it agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

* * *

CANADA ELECTIONS ACT

The House resumed from February 18 consideration of the motion that Bill C-24, an act to amend the Canada Elections Act and the Income Tax Act (political financing), be read the second time and referred to a committee, and of the amendment, and of the amendment to the amendment.

Mrs. Karen Redman (Kitchener Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate having an opportunity to speak to Bill C-24 which seeks to improve Canada's federal political financing procedures and to make the system fairer and more transparent.

When I first heard of the bill I questioned why we were going here and what needed to be revised? Certainly I would embrace the opportunity to hear opinions on all sides of this subject.

Canadians are justly proud of our system of democratic government that has been built up with so much care and effort over the years. Canadians value the transparency and the fairness of our electoral system that permits them to select members of Parliament who will represent them as well as express their views on important issues of the day.

I have had a very unique personal experience. I have been in public life since 1988 and that was at the same time that my brother-in-law became part of the American democratic system. There have been marked differences that I have been able to follow on a very up front and personal basis.

Canadians are gratified by the fact that Canada has become a watchword for openness and honesty, which has made it a model for many new democracies around the world. Most of us in the House would agree that our political process, including our electoral system, has in fact served us quite well.

However, as we know, democracy is a work in progress and it must change periodically to keep pace with the developments in our very dynamic society. This means that from time to time we must fine tune some of the elements so that they can continue to do the best job of serving Canadians.

For example, in recent years, some Canadians have expressed concerns about the way we finance electoral campaigns. They have told us that allowing well-to-do individuals, corporations and trade unions to make large donations to federal candidates carries along with it the danger that such a practice could allow some people and some groups to exercise undue influence over the deliberations of government and the political process. I should add that this is a perception and not a reality.

Still, as the members in the House know all too well, perception is important in politics. We must address these concerns, since if left unanswered they could undermine the confidence of Canadians in the fairness of government and in the justness of our political process.

This is precisely what the bill seeks to do. The reforms contained in the bill would go a long way toward strengthening public trust in our electoral system by renewing and improving the way we finance elections and bring greater transparency to the system.

I would like to take few moments to discuss some of the features contained in the bill and how they would achieve these noble goals.

Let us look at disclosure. As the government House leader stated when he first introduced the bill, the government has consulted experts, stakeholders, provincial authorities, and ordinary Canadians as to how they thought the current system was working and what would need to be added to it or changed in order to improve it.

We received a number of extremely valuable suggestions. One thing people told us time and time again was that they needed more information on how the electoral system was funded, where the funds come from, and how the money was used. The bill seeks to address this concern by means of a number of provisions designed to increase the transparency of our electoral financing system.

For example, it proposes to expand disclosure provisions so that Canadians could know exactly who is giving money to candidates and to parties, and how much they are receiving. It is clear that this is badly needed.

Currently only candidates and political parties are required to disclose the sources and the amounts of the contributions they receive to the Chief Electoral Officer. Even a casual observer of our political system would have to conclude that this is not adequate, since it omits some key players in the political process.

● (1315)

We must fill in these gaps with our knowledge by expanding this list to include other important participants.

With this in mind, the bill before us today contains provisions that would strengthen disclosure provisions and extend them to all political participants, including electoral district associations, leadership contestants and nomination contestants.

As part of this, all political participants would in the future be required to report contributions and expenses to the Chief Electoral Officer who would disclose the names and the addresses of those giving more than $200. Upon registration with the Chief Electoral Officer, leadership contestants would be required to disclose the amounts and the sources of contributions received prior to the date of registration.

In each of the four weeks immediately preceding a leadership convention candidates would have to submit information on amounts as well as sources of donations. Six months following the leadership contest they would have to submit information on all contributions received as well as expenses incurred to the Chief Electoral Officer.

Nomination contestants would also have to disclose amounts and sources of contributions as well as expenses incurred four months following the nomination contest, and if an election takes place during that period, four months after the election.

Electoral district associations would report contributions and expenses on an annual basis. They would also be allowed to issue tax receipts for contributions in between elections. As we can see, these new provisions would dramatically expand the information available to Canadians on how the system is funded and in doing so would go a long way toward enhancing public confidence in the integrity of our political system.

We looked at limiting where contributions come from. Better disclosure cannot by itself allay all the fears that large political donations may bring and may lead to a perception of undue political influence. That is why the bill would prohibit corporate and union donations, and would limit the amount individuals could contribute.

Only individuals would be able to make financial contributions to registered parties, and to leadership and nomination contestants. Contributions by individuals would be limited to $10,000 each year to registered parties and their electoral district association candidates and nomination contestants.

There is certainly room for debate in this area. Having been in public life since 1988 I can clearly and unequivocally state that nobody, no individual or corporation, has ever given me a $10,000 donation, so I think there is room for debate as to whether that is an appropriate limit for individuals.

During a leadership campaign individual contributions to a contestant of a registered party would be limited to $10,000. One small exception to this would be that corporations, unions and associations would be able to contribute a maximum of $1,000 in total to a party's candidates, nomination contestants and electoral district associations. Heavy penalties such as large fines and possible jail time would be levied to those organizations that try to get around this limit by telling employees to make contributions on their behalf. As we can see, these are fairly strong measures.

Prohibition of corporate and union contributions to political parties is not new. It was done in Quebec in 1977 and more recently it was done in Manitoba. It has been tried successfully in a number of other countries as well.

During the consultative process one of the strongest messages that came through was the need for a level playing field at the nomination level. This was a concern particularly expressed by women candidates. Pursuant to the bill, spending limits should be imposed at the nomination level, which would be the entry level for contestants, and sometimes the toughest fight any candidate will ever wage.

There is a greater need for fair competition among contestants. Taken together these changes would go a long way toward increasing the transparency of our electoral system as well as ensuring that Canadians could have confidence in that system.

● (1320)

However, one issue remains, namely how we maintain adequate levels of funding for a political system. It is clear that the virtual elimination of political contributions by corporations and unions, and the placing of limits on large individual contributions would certainly impact the ability of parties and candidates to fund election campaigns, something none of us would care to do.

To offset such a possible unintended impact the bill proposes to make up for the fall off in private contributions by increasing the currently existing financial assistance by the Government of Canada to parties and to candidates.

Such measures would include: increasing the percentage of election expenses reimbursed to parties from the current 22.5% to 50%, making polling eligible for reimbursement, raising the ceiling for expenses accordingly, lowering the threshold to qualify for reimbursement from 15% to 10% to allow more candidates to have their expenses reimbursed following an election, and providing registered parties with a quarterly allowance based on the percentage of votes gained in the last general election. This would work out annually to $1.50 per vote received in the previous general election.

I would encourage all members of this House to have a fulsome debate and I look forward to debating the bill when it returns from committee.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Mario Laframboise (Argenteuil—Papineau—Mirabel, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to have this opportunity to speak to Bill C-24 on the financing of political parties.

From the outset, the Bloc Quebecois indicated to the government that the bill on political party financing was a step in the right direction. I emphasize, one step.

The Quebec political party financing legislation is recognized in virtually all democratic societies throughout the world. It was introduced and enacted by the government of René Lévesque, and has proven its worth. It is "the" law concerning political party financing by the public, as far as respect of democracy is concerned in any democratic country.

The Prime Minister of Canada has made no attempt to conceal the fact that he owes to René Lévesque a good portion of his recommendations in Bill C-24 on political party financing.

Why do we consider this just one step in the right direction? Public financing should exclude any corporate funding, and this bill allows limited corporate contributions.

With all the scandals that have hit this government, it was time to do a proper cleanup, if I may put it that way. Yet funding from companies and labour unions is still allowed, to a maximum of $1,000.

Members will say that this is a dramatic decrease, except that the matter of corporations is so complex that, with parent companies, subsidiaries and associate companies—there are several divisions now—companies could make a financial contribution of much more than $1,000. Major protests will have been avoided once again. Why not simply have abolished financing by business? That would have sent a clear message that the only acceptable source of political party financing in Canada, as in Quebec, is individuals.

When we talk about financing by individuals, we are talking about contributions that individual men and women can make. In this bill, one contribution is permitted. Normally, the amount of the contribution is limited, but you will agree that $10,000 is not much of a limit. In Quebec, the ceiling on contributions by individuals is $3,000; that is the amount a man or a woman can give to a political party.

This bill would allow an individual to make a contribution of up to $10,000. How many individuals, I wonder, have the means to give $10,000, except company presidents, their families and board members, those who can slip through the back door what they cannot get through the front door.

That is why the higher the ceiling on financial contributions, the bigger the problems we face, because big business can make large contributions and consequently influence the decisions of elected representatives indirectly.

The Bloc Quebecois is recommending that we stick as close as possible to Quebec's ceiling of $3,000. We want Parliament to reduce contributions by individuals so that not only the wealthiest families are financing political parties, as this would cause people to say that, once again, the rich control democracy.

● (1325)

As far as we are concerned, this $10,000 limit should be reviewed and hopefully lowered significantly.

Moreover, this bill is indicative of what is going on on the political scene, especially within the Liberal Party of Canada. This bill will limit corporate and private contributions to leadership campaigns. There is a leadership race in the Liberal Party of Canada. Oddly enough, the bill will not apply to that leadership race.

Once again, the government is trying to redeem itself, by saying, "Look, we are going to become reasonable. In view of the recent scandals, we will try to clean up the legislation on the financing of political parties". But that will not clean up the race for the leadership of the Liberal Party of Canada.

Again, this is indicative of what is happening in this Parliament, and this is why people are losing confidence in their elected representatives. There are good things in there. I say it again, the Bloc Quebecois honestly believes this bill is a step in the right direction. But why not make it applicable right away to every election that will take place in Canada, including the race for the leadership of the Liberal Party of Canada?

Of course, only the Liberal political strategists will tell you why. This could jeopardize or probably considerably reduce the lead of some candidates. But of course this is an issue the government does not want people to deal with or even discuss, since the bill will only come into force on January 1, 2004, provided it is given speedy approval by the House.

Members will have understood that the Bloc Quebecois will fight for the principles, namely we will try once again to lower voluntary contributions to a level more respectful of every citizen in Quebec and Canada. However, we will not wage a war on principle and we will not systematically oppose the bill.

The House can count on the cooperation of the Bloc Quebecois, which is always proud to participate in cleaning up the practices that have tainted this Parliament for such a long time. I repeat that this political financing legislation is a step in the right direction. The legislation ensures that the government will provide financing to each political party proportionate to the number of votes obtained.

We have no problem with this. We have the same thing in Quebec. We will therefore support this type of government financing, which ensures that all parties who do reasonably well in the election will have adequate funding, without any interference and solicitation by major players, corporations or CEOs.

We often find out that some political parties are financed by big business. Clearly, I repeat, the Bloc Quebecois feels that this bill is a step in the right direction, not to mention that we would like all financing to come from individuals; companies should no longer be allowed to make contributions. We would also like the limit of $10,000 for individuals, men and women who contribute, to be as close as possible to the limit allowed in Quebec.

Again, whatever the naysayers may think, the political financing legislation in Quebec is among the most effective of its type and is even cited as an example by many democratic countries throughout the world. Like Canada, some countries are in the process of revising their political financing legislation.

It is a step in the right direction and we hope the government will accept the improvements that could be made to it.

● (1330)

[*English*]

Mr. John O'Reilly (Haliburton—Victoria—Brock, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Bill C-24 seeks to make fundamental changes to the way we fund political participants in the country.

I think all of us would agree that Canada's electoral system is one of the best in the world in terms of fairness and honesty. But as we know, democracy is a work in progress, which means we need to revisit our political and government systems from time to time to make sure they are doing the best possible job of serving Canadians.

One area requiring a second look, of course, involves the rules governing political financing. Let us look at requirements for financial disclosure. At present, the Canada Elections Act requires only registered parties and candidates to disclose contributions and expenditures to the Chief Electoral Officer. This effectively exempts other important players in the political process, such as electoral district associations and leadership and nomination contestants, from having to reveal where their money came from and how they spend it. In turn, this has reduced the transparency of the system and public confidence in it and has created what the Chief Electoral Officer refers to as the "black hole" of political financing.

We need to open up the system and give the public more and better information on what is going on behind the scenes. For example, we must address leadership contests. There are many going on in the House of Commons right now, all over the place. This is an area of great interest to Canadians. Little is known about how they are financed, which is strange given how important they are to the political landscape in this country. We need to know more about leadership contestants and who their supporters are. After all, one of them will eventually become the Prime Minister, the leader of the country, but of course that would be on this side.

The bill would make this possible by extending disclosure requirements for leadership campaigns as well as a number of other important activities. For example, once a party launches its campaign officially, leadership contestants would be required to register with Elections Canada. At that time, they would have to disclose all contributions received from their campaign up to that point.

They would also have to disclose contributions to their campaigns in each of the last four weeks prior to the date of the leadership convention. This responds to the criticism that filing a report six months after the contest is too late to be effective. Of course, contestants would still be required, six months after the end of the campaign, to disclose all contributions received and expenses incurred.

Once in place, these new measures would make important new information available to Canadians and open up this area to full public scrutiny, which would go a long way toward enhancing public confidence in the honesty and fairness of leadership campaigns.

Greater disclosure cannot by itself buttress public confidence and reassure Canadians that our approach to funding leadership campaigns is fair and above board, so the bill would ensure that only individuals would be able to make financial contributions to registered parties and leadership and nomination contestants. This is important since a recent Environics poll found that many Canadians feel that wealthy Canadians, large corporations and unions have too much influence on governments. In the same poll, almost two-thirds of respondents felt the government should stop campaign contributions from having too much influence on the government and two-thirds supported the idea of allowing just individuals to contribute to political participants.

The bill responds to this call for action by proposing a ban on corporate and union contributions except at the local level. Limits would be placed on individual contributions to remove any suggestion that well-to-do individuals could use large contributions to hijack government deliberations later on once the election is over. An annual ceiling of $10,000 would be placed on individual contributions to a registered party, its local associations, candidates and nomination contestants. Individuals would be allowed to contribute no more than $10,000 in total to the leadership contestants of a particular party.

These measures are tough, but they are not unusual nor do they represent a break with established Canadian practice, for such a prohibition has been in place since 1977 in Quebec and was recently implemented in Manitoba. They are in force in other countries around the world as well.

I want to reassure members that these measures would in no way interfere with leadership contests already under way. The bill would not apply to those contests that start prior to its coming into force, which would be either January 2004 or six months after the bill is passed by Parliament, whichever is later. This should provide enough time to put the necessary system in place while at the same time ensuring that both parties and contestants are able to adjust to the new measures.

● (1335)

Canadians have told us they want new approaches to funding our political system which would remove once and for all concerns that large donations by corporations, unions and well-off individuals give them undue influence over government. They want regulations to cover not only election campaigns, as is currently the case, but also nomination and leadership campaigns, which they see as equally important.

That is what the bill before us does today. It would provide greater disclosure and extend it to the new areas such as leadership campaigns. It would ban corporate and union contributions in a number of areas, including leadership campaigns, and limit what well-to-do individuals can contribute. This goes a long way to enhancing public confidence in the way we fund political activity in this country and that is why I support the bill.

As a former returning officer for a party and having filed audited papers in the city of Toronto for the Haliburton—Victoria—Brock area for a candidate who had won, when I took our audited statement in and was quite confident that it was well done, comprehensive and accurate, I was told by the person at the desk that it would be audited because it looked too good to be true. That person wanted to make sure that they would look at it in this light and go through every bit of it. I asked the person at the desk why they would audit one that they could read. The person turned around, showing me a bunch of shoeboxes full of returns that other people, losing candidates, had brought in and tied up with old shoelaces and said, “We're not going to audit those”. So I know that proper financial contributions listed in a such a manner that they are legible and which the Canadian public can read are the ones that hold the most weight.

I think we can enhance our electoral system. My riding is the second largest riding in southern Ontario. In my riding and the one next to it, we have one-third of the land in southern Ontario. We take up a large area. Contrary to what my friends in the Alliance would say, we do have the same Toronto influence on us. I do not cheer for the Toronto Maple Leafs, as I am more of a Montreal Canadiens fan, but when one lives 80 miles north of Toronto in a totally rural municipality—

Mr. Myron Thompson: Ask about the gun registry.

Mr. John O'Reilly: My friend from Wild Rose is heckling me. He came to the Lindsay fair this year and pretty near cleaned out all the hotdog stands. He had a great time and I welcome him to come back any time. He certainly helped the economy of our area by his presence. I think one of the butchers said that he was up by a cow a week. We thank him for helping our economy.

● (1340)

The member behind him is formerly from Oshawa. We get these true westerners. When I look around I see people from Oshawa. There are a couple of true westerners, but actually one is an American and one is from Oshawa and has land in my riding. I have to be good to him. He pays taxes in my riding. Somehow when one leaves Ontario one goes out west and becomes a Reformer, which is all right. We need western based dissident parties. I think they do a great job here. They sometimes make me look good, which is pretty hard to do sometimes.

Yes, I am a gun owner. I have seen the odd groundhog. I think I had a good meeting this morning in our committee, where we met some concerned firearms people. I registered my guns in November online. It took 10 minutes and cost nothing, so what is the matter with the system? I am one of the people who wants to see Bill C-10A debated here. It has to be debated here. There has to be transparency and there has to be accountability. We have to know where that money is being spent, that it is being spent to save lives in Canada and that it helps the police and helps legitimate gun owners abide by the law. I think that is a good part of it.

However, I do tend to cheer for the Canadiens. It has nothing to do with the fact that Mr. Speaker's son plays for them, nothing to do with that at all.

The Deputy Speaker: Enough of that. Resuming debate, the hon. member for Dartmouth.

● (1345)

Ms. Wendy Lill (Dartmouth, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure speak today to Bill C-24, an act to amend the Canada Elections Act and the Income Tax Act regarding political financing.

The NDP has long been calling for the removal of big money from politics and supports this legislation in principle. However, the devil is in the details in every piece of legislation and we will be combing over the details of the bill to make sure that it is really moving us toward fairness and a more democratic system of political financing.

I would like to review in brief some of the contents of Bill C-24 and talk about the concerns we have with it, which we will continue to raise. First is the issue of individual donations. The legislation allows individuals to donate $10,000 a year to any party, candidate or riding association. All contributions will be indexed for inflation. Individuals can donate in multiples of $10,000, for example, to the Liberals, to the Alliance, et cetera.

Our concern about this is that the amount is too high. We believe that this kind of money can still buy influence and the whole idea of this bill is to eliminate buying influence in our political system. The level should be set much lower. We would suggest something like $3,000, as it is in Quebec and Manitoba. The Canadian Labour Congress, the CLC, calls for $5,000. In addition, we would seek this amount as a limit for individual donations to a maximum amount for all parties, not to each party.

On the issue of corporate and union donations, the bill prohibits contributions to political parties from corporations, unions or other associations. As an exception, it does allow those organizations to contribute $1,000 annually to the aggregate of candidates, local associations and nomination contestants of a registered party. All contributions are combined under the limit of $1,000.

Again the NDP has a concern with this. Unions like the CAW, for example, would be considered as one unit no matter how many locals there are, but franchises of corporations, let us say Ford car dealerships, may be considered to be separate entities, each able to make a $1,000 donation. This is an inequity that we do not believe is fair. We must argue that all contributions be banned or that unions be given equal treatment.

On the issue of public funding for elections and between elections, the bill provides for an annual public subsidy to parties of $1.50 for every vote they received in the previous election. Based on the 2000 general election, the Liberals would receive $7.8 million annually, the Alliance $4.9 million annually, the PCs $2.4 million, the Bloc $2.1 million and the NDP $1.6 million. Had the $1.50 per vote been in place for the 1997 and 2000 elections, the NDP would have received more money than it received from union contributions, including the federal and provincial share of affiliation fees lost.

The bill extends the candidate rebates to those receiving 10% of the vote rather than the old 15% limit. It also increases the national rebate to 50% of allowable expenses for political parties from 22.5% and includes the cost of public opinion polling for the first time. Our concern is that the provision is not indexed and so will decrease in value over time. Contributions from individuals, corporations and unions are indexed. We must push for further indexing.

In terms of trust funds, several Liberal MPs, and perhaps others, have amassed large trust funds and we are not sure how the new legislation will treat trust funds. One interpretation is that they will continue to exist but could not be used for political purposes beyond the $1,000 annually that an association can donate to the candidates or riding associations. The NDP remains concerned that there will be an enormous temptation for some MPs to find ways to slip trust fund money into their political work and campaigns.

● (1350)

On the issue of third parties, if the government truly wants to remove the perception that big money rules politics, then it is even more imperative to limit the amount of money that third parties can spend during elections and on politics generally.

The amendments do not deal with third party expenditures. The existing elections act does limit expenditures of third parties but the Alberta Court of Appeal ruled in favour of the National Citizens' Coalition challenge. The federal government is appealing that ruling.

Our concern is that the intent to get big money out of politics is severely undercut if third parties are free to spend what they want. Once the political parties have restricted themselves to accept only individual donations, it would follow that judges would find it harder to rule against legislation limiting the involvement of third parties.

In conclusion, the NDP offers its support in principle to Bill C-24, an act to amend the Canada Elections Act. We will be working to make sure that it in fact is meeting the spirit of its intent. We will be working for specific amendments that will bring this legislation into line to benefit all Canadians.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Gilles-A. Perron (Rivière-des-Mille-Îles, BQ): Mr. Speaker, it is with pleasure that I rise today to speak on Bill C-24, which I could perhaps describe as plagiarizing the provincial legislation in effect in Quebec. I will not, however, since the bill before me today is not a carbon copy of the Quebec electoral law, which has been in effect for 26 years.

All week, I have been pleasantly surprised to hear my colleagues opposite speak highly of the late René Lévesque. To hear people across the way speak of René Lévesque like that warms the heart of a sovereignist, very much so.

Twenty six years ago, René Lévesque had a vision of the democratic political process. He had a vision of how to ensure that political parties are not bought, through contributions. Lévesque had a vision indeed.

The problem I have with this bill we are debating concerns the amount an individual may contribute, namely $10,000. That is a huge amount. I believe it is still a substantial enough amount to enable lobbyists to influence certain decisions.

I will give an example. Take the Minister of National Defence, a former vice-president of the Royal Bank in Toronto. He can very easily call up 20 of his friends and ask them to each write him a cheque for $10,000. Twenty times $10,000 is $200,000 that the Royal Bank would have contributed through the back door, or the side door.

Similarly, the Prime Minister of Canada can very easily pick up the phone and call Paul Desmarais at Power Corporation, asking him for $10,000. His friend Paul and his gang would come up with the $10,000.

The hon. member for LaSalle—Émard can very easily call up his buddies in shipping companies and say he needs $10,000. These are buddies from the shipping industry. Once again, only people in a certain category will be able to afford this kind of contribution. This $10,000 will allow them to continue influencing government decisions.

This is unacceptable. We are proposing that the limit be $3,000, the same as in the Quebec electoral law.

The other problem is also a serious one.

I would like to, if I may, come back on the issue of individual contributions. We in the Bloc Quebecois do not support corporate contributions. However, this is the 21st century, and contributions of $1,000, $2,000 or $3,000 as proposed in the bill could be considered acceptable. However, we recommend instead that there be no corporate donations at all.

The other problem I see, and that I am compelled to talk about, is the famous issue of the appointment of returning officers in each riding. The current practice will be continued, namely that the governor in council will appoint all returning officers. Currently, with the Liberal Party in power, it will appoint its Liberal cronies, former MPs, former corporate directors.

As a result, when I have to discuss anything with my riding's returning officer, or if I have a complaint to file, I am dealing with a political opponent.

● (1355)

As is the case in baseball, I am starting out with two strikes against me. The system should be as it is in Quebec. Allow me to explain how things are done in Quebec.

The appointments of returning officers are done in several stages. First, the position is advertised in newspapers. Anyone who reads newspapers in Quebec can learn about the position. Candidates for the job undergo a written and oral exam. Afterward, a selection committee makes a decision. There are no representatives of political parties on the selection committee. As a result, returning officers in Quebec are apolitical. They do not talk about politics, just about how to apply the Act Respecting Electoral Lists during the election. That is what they do.

The Bloc Quebecois supports the bill before us in principle. However, the Bloc Quebecois would like to see the changes I have just mentioned.

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

[*English*]

AGRICULTURE

Mr. Shawn Murphy (Hillsborough, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Canada's agricultural sector is a robust industry that contributes to the economy and quality of life of all Canadians. As the third largest employer, agriculture and agri-food accounts for 8.3% of Canada's gross domestic product. While farming is one of our oldest industries, it has also become one of the most innovative industries in the country.

Budget 2003 builds upon the $5.2 billion agricultural policy framework with the following initiatives. There is $220 million for the crop reinsurance fund; $100 million for food safety; $113 million for Canada's four veterinary colleges, one of which is located in my riding of Hillsborough; $20 million for venture capital and innovation through the Farm Credit Corporation; and $30 million for the Canadian Grain Commission.

Canada's farmers are a high priority for the Liberal government. Budget 2003 maintains and acts upon this commitment.

S. O. 31

MEMBER FOR LASALLE—ÉMARD

Mr. Larry Spencer (Regina—Lumsden—Lake Centre, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, the shine on the former finance minister is starting to fade as Canadian families begin to wake up to his tax and spend shell games. Let us take a closer look at some of the former minister's compulsive tax and spend tricks.

The member for LaSalle—Émard's EI fund was meant to pay for employment insurance, yet there is said to be a $45 billion EI surplus. Where has the money gone? Well, ask the former minister.

The member for LaSalle—Émard promised to scrap the GST, yet Canadian families are still paying it. Why? Well, ask the heir apparent.

The member for LaSalle—Émard's excise tax on fuel was meant to pay off the deficit. The deficit is gone, yet this tax remains. Why? Well, ask the want to be prime minister.

By contrast, the Alliance would immediately eliminate taxes originally brought in to reduce the deficit and it would make taxation more transparent, fair and honest.

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[*Translation*]

ROMÉO LEBLANC

Mr. Georges Farrah (Bonaventure—Gaspé—Îles-de-la-Madeleine—Pabok, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this morning, the official portrait of the Right Honourable Roméo LeBlanc was unveiled.

Mr. LeBlanc was the 25th Governor General of Canada and the first holder of this office to come from the Atlantic provinces.

The causes he holds dear influenced his actions as Governor General. These causes are volunteerism, the history of Canada, aboriginals, and peace-keeping by the Canadian Armed Forces.

During his mandate, he created the Governor General's Caring Canadian Award and the Governor General's Awards in Visual and Media Arts.

Painter Christian Nicholson did a wonderful job in paying tribute to one of the greatest Governor Generals that Canada has ever known, the Right Honourable Roméo LeBlanc.

* * *

● (1400)

[*English*]

THE ENVIRONMENT

Mrs. Karen Redman (Kitchener Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to congratulate our government on its recent commitment to renewable energy and alternative fuels.

Part of the $3 billion that the budget will provide for the environment will be used to support wind power, fuel cells and ethanol. The bio-diesel industry will also benefit from the removal of the excise tax.

Alternative energy technologies hold the promise of clean renewable energy with little or no environmental damage. These sources of energy will reduce Canada's dependence on fossil fuels.

In fact, the president of the Canadian Renewable Fuels Association praised this part of the budget saying "It is a very positive step for the ethanol industry. It means new jobs, economic growth, rural opportunities and cleaner air for us all".

We will be able to breathe the breath of fresher air as a result of the government's action on renewable energy.

* * *

STREET RACING

Mr. Joe Peschisolido (Richmond, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, next Thursday, February 27 there will be a forum in my riding of Richmond to increase public knowledge and awareness to the hazards of road racing.

In the last two years alone street racing has claimed the lives of five people in Richmond. It is a crime that continues nightly on area streets and has escalated into a major concern for area citizens and police alike.

I am proud to say that Richmond residents are united in their efforts to stop this dangerous activity. We have held discussion groups, awareness campaigns and public education activities to inform residents of the dangers associated with high speed road racing. In addition Richmond RCMP has introduced measures on area streets to target and deter young drivers from this violent activity.

I invite all concerned citizens to this forum to discuss means to curb this violent and reckless practice.

* * *

DNA DATABASE

Mr. Gary Lunn (Saanich—Gulf Islands, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, August 2, 2003 will mark 10 years since 14 year old Lindsey Nicholls went missing without a trace while hitchhiking to Courtenay to visit friends.

DNA is a critical tool in solving cases like Lindsey's. Despite this, the government has not created a missing persons DNA database.

There are over 6,000 unidentified DNA samples taken from crime scenes and 125 unidentified bodies in British Columbia morgues alone. Right now there is no way to link these samples to missing persons.

It is said that the average murder investigation costs $750,000. Collecting a DNA sample would cost $100.

I am currently drafting legislation to address these key gaps. In the coming weeks I will be asking each member for his or her support.

This is not about privacy for criminals. This is not about money. This is about justice, justice for Lindsey Nicholls, her family and every other missing person in this country.

[*Translation*]

IRAQ

Mr. Serge Marcil (Beauharnois—Salaberry, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, today, I am speaking on behalf of the 6,200 residents of the Beauharnois—Salaberry riding who have presented me with a petition stating their refusal to accept war as a solution to the crisis in Iraq.

I will deliver to the Prime Minister the signatures of these men, women and children who are stating their clear opposition to a war in Iraq.

I am still convinced that this is still the only way to avoid the worst: the loss of hundreds of thousands of lives; the starvation of a population ruled by a tyrant and dictator; and, finally, other ills that may befall a people that has suffered far too long.

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GASOLINE PRICES

Ms. Jocelyne Girard-Bujold (Jonquière, BQ): Mr. Speaker, since yesterday, the Coalition to protect Fuel Consumers in my region has been calling on everyone to boycott all the gas stations on Talbot Boulevard, between Royaume Boulevard and Jacques-Cartier Street, except for the Shell station on the corner of Saint-Thomas Street in Saguenay.

The reason is simple. These gas stations are corporate owned, in other words, they belong to the oil companies. But there is more. By asking the public not to buy gas from corporate owned stations, fuel consumers will send a clear message that they are fed up with the games that the oil companies are playing at their expense when they artificially increase gas prices. No one is fooled when all the oil companies increase their prices at the same time. There is the appearance of collusion and consumers are the victims of this blatant lack of competition.

I encourage other cities to do likewise.

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● (1405)

[*English*]

BADGER FLOOD

Mr. R. John Efford (Bonavista—Trinity—Conception, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the flooding over the weekend of the town of Badger, Newfoundland and Labrador has left many residents homeless but not hopeless.

After having to flee so suddenly, many families were left with only what they were wearing and millions of dollars worth of damage. However they are discovering a flood of another kind now, the flood of kindness.

Donations of food, clothing and cash have been pouring in for the more than 1,000 residents who have been displaced. Clothing has been given by the Wal-Mart chain. The Canadian Tire Foundation for Families has made donations for families. McDonald's has donated bottled water. Several local companies have donated beds, TVs and furniture.

It is kindness and generosity like this that will make all the difference to the residents of this troubled town. The people of Badger are now asking the Minister of National Defence, who is responsible for emergency measures, to visit the town of Badger and give them some level of comfort as to what the government's response will be.

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BADGER FLOOD

Mr. Peter Goldring (Edmonton Centre-East, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, a disaster has befallen the town of Badger in Newfoundland and Labrador this week. Waist deep flood waters drove 1,100 residents from their very homes. Houses and vehicles, half submerged, were abandoned to the ravages of nature. With a sinister twist, nature's torment of the town of Badger continues as a winter deep freeze has it locked in an iron grip of ice, unyielding but for the hope of an early spring thaw.

The surreal appearance of the deserted, abandoned town of Badger today belies an even more destructive hidden force soon to be released by warm weather.

All citizens should open their hearts to demonstrate support for our fellow Canadians' plight in the spirit shown by the Hay West initiative last summer: Canadians helping Canadians.

A campaign is underway to help the residents of Badger. I call upon all parliamentarians and all citizens of Canada to get involved and show the community of Badger that we truly do care.

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MERCURY EMISSIONS

Hon. Charles Caccia (Davenport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, a just published United Nations report entitled, "Elemental Mercury and Inorganic Mercury Compounds: Human Health Aspects" warns that the world's environment is being contaminated by alarming amounts of mercury.

Once emitted into the atmosphere, mercury travels thousands of kilometres to other continents by way of air currents and is then deposited through rain and snowfalls into the aquatic system and the food chain. The report claims mercury causes brain damage, particularly among infants. Also, mercury poses a major threat to the world's fishing industry.

The biggest source of mercury emissions is from coal-burning power plants and waste incinerators. Here in Canada, the Lakeview, Nanticoke and other coal-burning power plants should be converted to natural gas so as to reduce the quantity of mercury entering the environment and the food chain.

* * *

THE BUDGET

Ms. Libby Davies (Vancouver East, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister prides himself that this is a people's budget. Let us be clear, the people who have been hurt the most by 10 years of Liberal damage are still hurting after the budget.

I was desperately hoping for good news on the housing front, but we are barely closer to the 1% solution for affordable housing that is needed to produce 20,000 to 30,000 units a year. What we will get is maybe 2,500.

If Canadians are waiting for affordable quality child care, wait on. Take a number and hope to get one of the only 3,000 spaces over two years, when 82% of kids do not have access to quality child care.

Then there is the child tax benefit. What did the federal Liberals say to poor families? "You are a priority. Well, not until 2007".

With accumulated surpluses of $80 billion, one would think that eliminating poverty in this country would be an affordable priority. However, the Liberals have shown yet again that their priorities are with tax cuts and helping well off Canadians get more.

So much for the people's budget.

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[*Translation*]

THE BUDGET

Ms. Monique Guay (Laurentides, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the former president of the Treasury Board, Marcel Massé, announced with great fanfare on March 8, 1996, and I quote, "When Bouchard has to make cuts, those of us in Ottawa will be able to demonstrate that we have the means to preserve the future of social programs".

The surplus that the Liberals are so proud of was built on the backs of the unemployed, children, the sick, young people and the less fortunate in our society.

When the complacent Liberal members applaud this heartless budget, penned by the Prime Minister himself, they are congratulating him for wanting to prevent the National Assembly of Quebec from implementing a parental leave program that young families in Quebec have been asking for.

Why are the Liberal members from Quebec not demanding that the government do something about the fiscal imbalance, which is a daily threat to Quebec's ability to meet the glaring needs of its people?

* * *

● (1410)

[*English*]

HEALTH

Mr. Larry Bagnell (Yukon, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am delighted to rise today to announce a very successful conclusion to a meeting at the Prime Minister's residence this morning, in which a basic understanding of northern health care needs was agreed to.

I would like to commend the Prime Minister, the three northern premiers and the members of Parliament from Nunavut and the Northwest Territories for developing this special arrangement to deal with the unique health care requirements of the north.

I also want to recognize all the officials in the federal and territorial governments who always work so hard anonymously behind the scenes to make these successes possible.

Finally, I would like to thank all northerners and all those people here in southern Canada who lent their support and understanding for the health care needs of the northern territories.

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BADGER FLOOD

Mr. Rex Barnes (Gander—Grand Falls, PC): Mr. Speaker, the residents of Badger are facing devastation as a result of the flooding of the Exploits River.

Their lives changed forever on February 15 when the raging water and ice floes resulted in the total evacuation of the community.

The devastation is phenomenal. Family homes have been destroyed. The town's infrastructure is collapsing. Businesses have shut down indefinitely. The social and economic impact is staggering. The despair and anxiety are gut wrenching.

Among these emotions there has been an outpouring of sympathy, generosity and caring. Compassion is what makes us proud to be Canadians.

I call upon the federal government to respond in our time of need. I ask that a special relief fund be put in place. The residents of Badger need to know that their country is with them at this very difficult hour.

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[*Translation*]

CONSTRUCTION INDUSTRY

Mr. Marcel Proulx (Hull—Aylmer, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, spring will soon be here and the construction season in the National Capital area will be upon us once again.

Unfortunately, the conflict about construction worker mobility is still not settled. Since Ontario passed Bill 17 on construction labour mobility, Quebec workers have to comply with numerous formalities to work in Ontario. Furthermore, Quebec contractors cannot bid on government projects in Ontario. The Government of Quebec has, in turn, established a protectionist regime governing the right to work in the Quebec construction industry.

It is high time that the Ontario and Quebec ministers resumed negotiations so that construction workers and consumers in the National Capital Region do not have to bear the brunt of their disagreement.

* * *

[*English*]

B.C. EAR BANK

Mr. Rob Merrifield (Yellowhead, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, Health Canada's ability to ensure the health and safety of Canadians has been called into question once again.

The B.C. Ear Bank was shut down in October after local officials discovered shoddy record keeping. They could not determine whether tissues had been properly screened for diseases such as HIV or hepatitis. All tissues have been recalled and officials say that anyone who has received tissue since 1975 should undergo testing.

Concerns about the clinic were raised in the early 1990s and again in 1998. Is this another tainted blood scandal?

Canadians deserve to know why action was not taken when red flags went up in the 1990s. Why did Health Canada wait until yesterday to inform Canadians when the clinic was shut down in October? What national standards are in place to prevent such problems from occurring in the first place?

This afternoon those questions will be placed on the Order Paper. We expect clear answers from the government.

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[*Translation*]

ABORIGINAL PEOPLES

Mr. Yvan Loubier (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I would like to take advantage of this opportunity to invite all members of this House to meet first nations leaders from across Canada today, after 3 p.m., in Room 238-S, Centre Block.

This will provide us all, the Liberal MPs in particular, with an opportunity to learn more about aboriginal peoples and their aspirations.

This reception and the display that goes with it will help us discover the true reality of the first nations people as well as their positions on the various bills that will be coming up for debate in the House in the months to come.

This government needs to give up trying to convince Canadians and Quebeckers, and MPs, that its relationship with the aboriginal community is harmonious and constructive. To find out the truth, come and meet and greet the key stakeholders.

* * *

[*English*]

HALDIMAND WAR MEMORIAL HOSPITAL

Mr. John Maloney (Erie—Lincoln, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to congratulate the Haldimand War Memorial Hospital in my riding of Erie—Lincoln for its voluntary commitment to join Natural Resources Canada's energy innovators initiative.

Recognized by the Minister of Natural Resources as an energy innovator, Haldimand War Memorial Hospital has made a long term commitment to use energy efficiency to reduce costs and slow the growth of Canada's greenhouse gas emissions.

All sectors of Canada's economy are being called upon to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. I would like to acknowledge and commend the Haldimand War Memorial Hospital for being a leader in this movement. I would also like to applaud Natural Resources Canada for its support of organizations such as the Haldimand War Memorial Hospital.

Canada's commitment to reduce greenhouse gases and to combat climate change has brought about effective and innovative programs, such as the energy innovators initiative, which will help pave the path to our future as a sustainable and energy efficient nation. Canadians everywhere are joining in the fight for sustainable development.

ORAL QUESTION PERIOD

● (1415)

[*English*]

FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Mr. Stephen Harper (Leader of the Opposition, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, there is increasing confusion about the government's position on Iraq.

I offer the following chronology of confusion. In December the Prime Minister said that there could be no action without the approval of the United Nations. On January 23 he said that with evidence from the allies he would support action. On Tuesday he said that Canada would not join a coalition of the willing. Yesterday he was back on the fence.

What is the Prime Minister's position of the day?

Hon. Bill Graham (Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am sorry if there is confusion on this issue. I have to believe it is in the minds of our hon. opponents, because the fact is that we have been clear throughout this whole issue that we are supporting the United Nations process. The Prime Minister clearly said that when he spoke to Mr. Bush some time ago. He has consistently repeated that message. Our diplomatic efforts have been in that respect.

Yesterday, Mr. Heinbecker clearly was trying to work through the United Nations process to see if we could bring clarity through that, and that is the Canadian position. We are very proud of the way we have been able to—

The Speaker: The hon. Leader of the Opposition.

Mr. Stephen Harper (Leader of the Opposition, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, I can assure you that confusion is not just among all opposition parties, but Canadians and foreign governments around the world as well.

I go back to January when the French and German governments were already complaining and calling on Canada to take some kind of a position. Yesterday the British ambassador to the United Nations stated “Canada will have to take a position...on one side or the other. It is decision time”.

I ask the Prime Minister, which side of the fence does he find himself on today?

Hon. Bill Graham (Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I had the opportunity of having a long conversation this morning with my colleague, Jack Straw, in the United Kingdom. There is no confusion in the mind of the United Kingdom government on the position of Canada and there is no confusion either on this side of the House or in the population of Canada.

Canada is on the side of peace and of working through the international institutions we have created throughout the years, and that is what we have always done.

Mr. Stephen Harper (Leader of the Opposition, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, if the British government is not confused, that is not what it is saying at the United Nations.

[*Translation*]

So far, the Prime Minister has a history of flip-flopping on this matter.

On January 25, the Prime Minister did not know if a second resolution was needed. Four days later, he said the first resolution was enough. On February 11, the Prime Minister voted against a second resolution. The next day, he said he supported a second resolution.

What is the Prime Minister's position today?

Hon. Bill Graham (Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker,our message remains the same to this House, to Canadians, and to the world: namely that there is a UN process that offers the best hopes of getting through this crisis without a war. Nothing has changed.

That was Mr. Heinbecker's message yesterday before the Security Council, when he told it that we are supporting the Security Council in its attempt to come up with a clear and precise solution that asks Saddam Hussein to comply so that the situation can be resolved peacefully.

* * *

[*English*]

MEMBER FOR LASALLE—ÉMARD

Mr. John Reynolds (West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, the former finance minister continues to amaze the crowds with his dance of the veils, with the ethics counsellor standing just off stage catching whatever is shed. The first layer was the blind trust that no one could see through. Next came blind management. Now we are down to the last and flimsiest layer, the supervisory agreement.

Could the Prime Minister explain why the former finance minister was allowed the opportunity for hands on management by the ethics counsellor while all other ministers adhered to the stricter blind trust or blind management agreements?

Hon. John Manley (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the arrangements that were in place were those that were appropriate to the circumstances and, in fact, reflect the views of the Parker commission that reviewed these matters in the past. The former minister complied entirely with the requirements before him.

● (1420)

Mr. John Reynolds (West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, the supervisory agreement is a loophole big enough for the ancient mariner to sail his whole fleet through.

The loophole is "as the ethics counsellor otherwise determines". The code says that a minister must dispose of his assets or put them in a blind trust or in blind management. There is absolutely no mention of a supervisory agreement in the code.

Is the Prime Minister admitting that only one cabinet minister in history has been allowed this exemption? Why did he allow the former finance minister this exemption when the Minister for Natural Resources and all others could not have it?

Hon. John Manley (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would point out that Mr. Justice Parker, in his commentary on this, indicated that the blind trust should never be used for anything like a family business or a family firm.

The rules that were in place were complied with. The ethics counsellor overviewed the requirements and ensured that compliance was adequate.

* * *

[*Translation*]

IRAQ

Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, UN weapons inspectors recently told the Security Council that Iraq is being more cooperative, that progress is being made, and that more time is needed to complete their work. This is what the inspectors said.

Since the inspections are working, and since the international community needs time, will the minister admit that giving Iraq a close deadline, as Canada is proposing, seriously jeopardizes the chances for a peaceful resolution to this conflict?

Hon. Bill Graham (Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I fully agree with the hon. member that time is needed to achieve a peaceful resolution to this conflict.

However, the situation cannot go on indefinitely. Even the French and all the countries that want peace recognize that only by asking Saddam Hussein to do certain specific things within a set timeframe can this issue be settled and a peaceful solution to this crisis be achieved.

This is the contribution made by Canada yesterday, and our position will not change.

Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, setting a deadline is something artificial. Let us leave it to the inspectors to set the date, based on what the needs are.

It seems to me that Canada is not trying to save peace but, rather, to save face for Great Britain and the United States. But this is not what we should be doing.

Hon. Bill Graham (Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I think there is a misunderstanding here. Canada did not propose a deadline. On the contrary, we made it clear that we would not propose a specific date. We told the Security Council, "You are in charge. Therefore, you set a date that takes into account the requirements for peace and the obligation for Saddam Hussein to comply".

This is where we now stand. This is the approach that we will pursue. I believe this is a very positive contribution on the part of Canada.

Ms. Francine Lalonde (Mercier, BQ): Mr. Speaker, from the moment that Canada starts promoting a shorter deadline for the disarmament of Iraq, the government must tell us that it has espoused the logic of war, because that is the truth.

The minister cannot deny that the proposal to set a deadline for a final result, which must be to the satisfaction of the Americans I might add, is basically tantamount to setting a date for going to war.

Hon. Bill Graham (Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): On the contrary, Mr. Speaker. I think it is very important that the House, the hon. members and the Canadian public know that our contribution here is to avert war by clarifying the situation. If we remain in the dark, war could break out against the wishes of the international community.

With clarification, we have a chance of finding a way out. That is what Canada wants; that is what it is promoting. I am proud of the contribution we have been able to make in this respect.

Ms. Francine Lalonde (Mercier, BQ): Mr. Speaker, something is not right here. The minister must know that the proposal Canada announced yesterday is what the U.S. is proposing. It has been widely reported by the international press. So far, however, each new report by the inspectors has indicated progress. The process is taking time, but it is yielding results.

Does the minister not realize that, instead of speeding up the inspection process, his proposed deadline will in fact block this process and prevent peaceful disarmament? I am convinced this is not what he wants.

● (1425)

Hon. Bill Graham (Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we must recognize that there are two aspects to this crisis: the Iraqi one and the American one.

We must therefore consider both aspects. Iraq has to realize that it has obligations and that these obligations must be fulfilled within a reasonable timeframe.

Canada has not set a date. Canada has not required anything from anyone. We have simply made an observation that is logical to everyone. There is a need to know the terms and by when these must be met. That is what we have said—

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

[*English*]

Mr. Bill Blaikie (Winnipeg—Transcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Foreign Affairs. Canada may not have suggested a particular date but it has certainly suggested there be a date. While the Minister of Foreign Affairs talks a good talk about the United Nations process, it seems to us that the government is open to the charge of doing the work of the United States when it comes to the Security Council.

Could the Minister of Foreign Affairs commit that if Canada is interested in a timeframe, it will be a timeframe established with the weapons inspectors and not necessarily with the United States?

Hon. Bill Graham (Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is clear that our position has always been to work within the United Nations system.

One thing we can all take a great deal of comfort and pride in is that the weapons inspectors, mandated by the Security Council, have done serious work and have created credibility around the UN system. Canada totally supports the weapons inspectors. In fact Mr. Heinbecker saw Dr. Blix this morning. We are in continual contact with Dr. Blix. I have spoken to him on a regular basis.

I want to assure the House and all members that we work with the weapons inspectors to ensure that the inspection system works.

Mr. Bill Blaikie (Winnipeg—Transcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is important that the credibility the minister just spoke of be preserved and not compromised by an artificial deadline.

The minister has said that the position is clear, but many Canadians remain unclear about what the position of the Canadian government is if the UN process breaks down.

Could we at least have a commitment from the Minister of Foreign Affairs that if the UN process breaks down, Canada will not automatically become part of a process set by the U.S.?

Hon. Bill Graham (Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, our Prime Minister was in Chicago last week. He received a standing ovation from the Americans in the audience when he told them that we were their ally because we came to them with our independent appreciation of this. He said clearly that we wanted them and the world to work through the United Nations system. I can certainly give the assurance to the hon. member that we are not accepting what the United States proposes on a timeline or anything else.

What we are seeking to do is create the conditions which would allow peace to prevail and we will continue to do that under all circumstances.

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ETHICS

Mr. Rick Borotsik (Brandon—Souris, PC): Mr. Speaker, the conflict of interest code that covers ministers of the Crown is conducted in secret. The Prime Minister admitted that he did not know when his former finance minister was using a loophole to meet with managers of his vast holdings. The ethics counsellor says that privacy considerations prevent him from discussing whether other ministers have used the loophole.

My question is for the Deputy Prime Minister. How do Canadians know that ministers are not participating in cabinet decisions that directly or indirectly affect their private holdings?

Hon. John Manley (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, there is no loophole. There are provisions that have been established as a result of the Parker Commission that deal with the situation where a minister has private holdings which enable him to deal with those in a framework as established by the ethics counsellor.

I am sure the hon. member would agree that to have private holdings ought not to be an obstacle to public service.

* * *

THE BUDGET

Mr. Loyola Hearn (St. John's West, PC): Mr. Speaker, in this week's budget the finance minister announced that he would split the CHST into a health transfer and a social transfer on April 1, 2004. We agree. However by that time the member for LaSalle—Émard, who set up the CHST, could be the new prime minister.

My question is for the finance minister. What guarantees has he sought from the member for LaSalle—Émard that he will actually go ahead with the promise of splitting the CHST?

● (1430)

The Speaker: I am afraid the hon. member's question does not relate to the administrative responsibility of the government at this time. The hon. member for Calgary—Nose Hill.

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CITIZENSHIP AND IMMIGRATION

Mrs. Diane Ablonczy (Calgary—Nose Hill, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, the government has turned a deaf ear to pleas that Ernst Zundel be kept out of Canada. On February 11, the B'nai Brith publicly requested that the immigration minister respect the fact that Canada's courts, all the way up to the Supreme Court, found Zundel poses, "a danger to the security of Canada".

Why do we find today that this security threat has been admitted to Canada and is apparently applying for refugee status?

Hon. Denis Coderre (Minister of Citizenship and Immigration, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this is a very important and serious issue. There are some individuals who are using one of the most generous refugee systems in the world for those who are in need. I understand there are some individuals who feel cheated because some people abuse the system. I will not let this go.

Mrs. Diane Ablonczy (Calgary—Nose Hill, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, it does not need to be that way. Refugee laws say that someone found to be inadmissible to Canada on grounds of security is ineligible to make a refugee claim. That is exactly what CSIS and our courts have found Zundel to be, a threat to Canadian security. This is grounds to simply dismiss any refugee claim he might make and deport him, or the minister can leave the door wide open for Zundel to make a refugee claim and launch more litigation, all at Canada's expense.

Will the minister tell Canadians just how long he intends to let Zundel stay in Canada?

Hon. Denis Coderre (Minister of Citizenship and Immigration, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I will not comment on this specific issue. The member is a lawyer and she knows exactly how the system works. We have to be very careful if we want to be efficient. I can say one thing. I will not let the system be trampled on.

[*Translation*]

THE BUDGET

Mr. Pierre Paquette (Joliette, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the latest budget proves once again that the federal government cannot resist interfering in areas of jurisdiction belonging to Quebec and the provinces. The latest example is the Canadian Learning Institute, with its $100 million budget.

This will interfere in a big way with Quebec's ability to make its own choices in education and occupational training.

Can the Minister of Finance tell us if the federal government intends to use this institute to evaluate how Quebec has done in terms of learning, professional development and occupational training?

Hon. John Manley (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I believe that this institute is important in establishing an information base for all provinces that will help in identifying the best practices in each. It is possible that Quebec's practices might prove very beneficial to the other provinces.

Mr. Pierre Paquette (Joliette, BQ): Mr. Speaker, is the Minister of Finance, in declaring that the fathers of the Constitution made a mistake in giving the provinces jurisdiction over post-secondary education and by creating this new institute and the new Canada Graduate Scholarships, not trying to do indirectly what he cannot do directly, which is to create a federal department of education?

Hon. Stéphane Dion (President of the Queen's Privy Council for Canada and Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member would be unable to find any reference in the Constitution indicating that a country cannot collect statistics in order to see what is happening in a particular area.

We created a health institute, without interfering in health care. He should reread the Clair commission's report. It invites the Government of Quebec to cooperate on health with this institute.

That is what we intend to do in education. We will not be interfering in the classroom. We are going to respond to the OECD's requests for statistics on education. That is what the federal government is going to do, in full cooperation with the provinces.

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[*English*]

NATIONAL DEFENCE

Miss Deborah Grey (Edmonton North, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of National Defence has now announced a new high tech project to modernize our military, which is just great. After budget day he will have to modernize his math instead.

His new ISTAR computer surveillance program will cost $700 million, which is a mighty big bite out of the $800 million total he was given for this entire year.

The minister talks about brains over brawn. I would be pleasantly surprised if he engaged in the former when he answers this question. With only $100 million remaining for everything, how does the minister intend to cover all his bases?

● (1435)

Hon. David Collenette (Minister of Transport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I regret my colleague is unable to be here today. The new technology that has been alluded to in the press is something that will put Canada on the cutting edge in terms of defence. That has only been assisted by the money that was received in the budget, the $800 million extra a year that will help the Canadian armed forces.

Miss Deborah Grey (Edmonton North, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, that technology is just great. It is on the cutting edge but everything else in the military is on the cutting floor.

On Tuesday the government promised $800 million annually for defence, a sum that does not even come close to addressing the shortfall in the Canadian Forces.

It is great for the minister to talk about that but it does not leave any money for rebuilding our troops, providing them with decent housing or replacing aging equipment which is getting so old so fast. In the face of security threats at home and abroad we simply cannot afford to shortchange our military this way.

The minister either does not recognize the problem he has or he has no brawn at the cabinet table. Which is it?

Hon. David Collenette (Minister of Transport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of National Defence certainly recognizes the challenges of the armed forces. That is why he publicly called for an increase in the budget and received moneys in the budget. He knows the needs and those needs will be met with the increased funding.

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[*Translation*]

KYOTO PROTOCOL

Mr. Bernard Bigras (Rosemont—Petite-Patrie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, by allocating a mere $2 billion over five years to implementing the Kyoto protocol, the government is not showing any real determination, because the outcome of the $1.7 billion it has invested over the past five years has been, not a decrease in greenhouse gas emissions, but a 6% increase.

How can the Minister of the Environment explain his belief that the government's effort in this budget is a significant one, and by what miracle would investing a virtually identical amount over the next five years have any more positive effect than in the last five?

Hon. David Anderson (Minister of the Environment, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is true that we have so far invested $3.7 billion toward the necessary goal of reducing greenhouse gas emissions. It is quite likely that in another two, three, maybe seven years the Minister of Finance might increase that amount. The announcement by the Minister of Finance two days ago of another $2 billion is still not bad, yet the hon. member is already complaining. When most of that amount has been spent, then perhaps it will be the right time to ask for more.

Mr. Bernard Bigras (Rosemont—Petite-Patrie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, as its record on reducing greenhouse gas emissions shows, Quebec is in the best position to attain the Kyoto objective.

Would the Minister of the Environment not be better off if he sat down with the Government of Quebec to negotiate a bilateral agreement and to hand the money over pronto?

Hon. David Anderson (Minister of the Environment, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as I have said often in this House and elsewhere, we hope to have a bilateral agreement between the Province of Quebec and the federal government. I have spoken with Minister Boisclair on numerous occasions on this. We expect a positive outcome. I do not know why the hon. member is not aware of the cooperation between the two levels of government.

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[*English*]

NATIONAL CHILD CARE

Mr. Monte Solberg (Medicine Hat, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, the reason the Minister of Human Resources Development has not got a deal with the provinces on a national child care initiative is because she wants to channel the entire $1 billion into institutional day care.

However the provinces know that parents want choice in child care. Parents want the money to go directly into their own pockets in the form of a universal deduction for all children. That would start to address at least some of the discrimination in the tax code against stay at home parents and those with other child care arrangements.

Why is the minister so opposed to choice in child care?

Hon. Jane Stewart (Minister of Human Resources Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, on the contrary. As the hon. member becomes more experienced with the complex issues that we have to deal with in family and child policies, he will realize that it requires a number of measures. It requires tax incentives, tax issues and tax measures of which we have a number. It requires income support.

I am so glad that through the national child benefit we have significantly increased that support, but it also requires child care. In our system we have allowed for the flexibility in the provinces. It does not necessarily mean regulated care only in centres. It could be regulated care in homes.

● (1440)

Mr. Monte Solberg (Medicine Hat, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, I am disappointed that the minister does not recognize the importance of people who make the choice to look after their children themselves at home.

The minister's department is legendary for its ability to waste, squander and lose track of hundreds of millions of dollars. Even the finance minister is calling on all departments to start cutting waste.

Instead of using new money for these HR initiatives that were announced in the budget, will she cut some of the mountain of waste in her department to fund these new initiatives? By the way, she just dropped some money on the floor. She might want to pick it up before she—

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Human Resources Development.

Hon. Jane Stewart (Minister of Human Resources Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, from his question, it sounds to me that the hon. member is suggesting it is a waste for the government to invest $935 million in working with the provinces and territories to create quality, reliable, regulated child care spaces. If that is the way he thinks, let us be clear.

However on this side of the House we are in unanimous agreement that the right thing for us to do is to work with the provinces and territories to ensure that Canadian parents can rely on a strong system of quality child care for their children.

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AGRICULTURE

Mrs. Rose-Marie Ur (Lambton—Kent—Middlesex, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Tuesday's budget contained an extra $100 million over two years for the Canadian Food Inspection Agency. Can the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food tell this House in what areas he intends to allocate these dollars?

Hon. Lyle Vanclief (Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am certainly pleased that in the budget the government recognized the important role of the Canadian Food Inspection Agency, and the safety and the quality of Canadian food by further providing another $100 million over two years.

It will allow the agency to continue to enhance food safety in Canada. The regulatory system, along with the border control, will ensure the safety of food exported from our country to other countries and imported from other countries. It will ensure the health of Canadians as well as the health of animals and plants in Canada.

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INFRASTRUCTURE

Ms. Judy Wasylycia-Leis (Winnipeg North Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, how in the world could Liberals in Toronto be bragging today about how great the budget is for Toronto? If all of the infrastructure money—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh.

Ms. Judy Wasylycia-Leis: Mr. Speaker, only the Liberals would clap for a kilometre of subway in their city if all of the infrastructure money were to be spent there. If Toronto were to get an equal share with every other community, it would get 25 centimetres of subway.

My question is for the finance minister, who interestingly has also ignored his own home town, except for the Ottawa Senators. Does he really think that it is good enough to help the city of Ottawa build 14.5 centimetres of light rail?

Hon. John Manley (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am not sure how she felt interrupted, but I can assure her I listened closely to her question.

I was waiting for her to mention the money we put into homelessness; the money we put into affordable housing; the $5 billion we put into infrastructure in the last two budgets, much of which is still not spent; the money we put into health care that helps people who live in the cities; the money we put into a clean environment to make clean air better for people living in cities; and the money we have given to poor children, many of whom live in cities.

I would not have interrupted her if she had put all those things in her question.

Ms. Judy Wasylycia-Leis (Winnipeg North Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I did not have enough time in 35 seconds to criticize all of those areas, but I want to focus on infrastructure.

The finance minister's plan will take 190 years to meet the real needs the communities face right now, communities like Walkerton, North Battleford, and communities all over Newfoundland and Labrador who are worried about the state of their drinking water. They do not have two centuries to wait, but if every penny of the minister's infrastructure plan were spent on clean water, we would maybe have 15 new plants across Canada.

I want to ask the minister, since we are all worried about privatized water and more Walkertons, with 15 plants—

The Speaker: I am afraid the 35 seconds are gone. The hon. Minister of the Environment.

Hon. David Anderson (Minister of the Environment, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member really must read the budget because in it she will find $600 million specifically for the federal area of responsibility with respect to clean water. She will find $8 billion, the new $3 billion and the previous $5 billion, which is available for municipalities for water treatment plants, both for drinking water and for dealing with waste water.

She will find opportunities in the regional development budgets that encourage municipalities to spend the money in ways which are environmentally friendly. There is plenty there. All she has to do is look.

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● (1445)

NATIONAL DEFENCE

Mrs. Elsie Wayne (Saint John, PC): Mr. Speaker, yesterday the Minister of National Defence confirmed what many have suspected, that he is looking at eliminating Canada's Leopard tanks after previously suggesting that such an idea was crazy.

How can the minister make arbitrary decisions on what capabilities the Canadian military will require before undertaking a full review of defence and foreign policy?

Hon. David Collenette (Minister of Transport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is true that there will be a review of defence policy, but that does not stop the minister from looking at the department and seeing where savings can be made. I should inform the hon. member that time does move on. The last time tanks were deployed by Canada was in the Korean war over a half century ago.

Mrs. Elsie Wayne (Saint John, PC): Mr. Speaker, in the budget the Minister of Finance committed to providing $950 million to the Canadian Forces, however it costs the Canadian Forces more than $32 million a day to function even at currently reduced levels. The money the minister provided is enough for the Canadian Forces to operate for 29 days.

Will the minister admit that he has shortchanged the military in this budget and commit to providing the funding the forces need to do its job? Or is he still hiding in the washroom?

Hon. David Collenette (Minister of Transport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, let me assure the hon. member that the Minister of Finance will admit no such thing because in consultations with the Minister of National Defence he realized that the military had to receive more money. Some $800 million dollars was given to the military on a sustaining basis and that will be more than adequate for its needs.

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THE ENVIRONMENT

Mr. Bob Mills (Red Deer, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of the Environment has been quoted as saying that we need a control group of four disinterested departments to be established to decide the spending of $1.7 billion allocated in Tuesday's budget for climate change.

My question is, where does the Minister of the Environment think he will find four Liberal ministers who are not interested in spending an extra $1.7 billion?

Hon. David Anderson (Minister of the Environment, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the contradiction in the hon. member's mind is that we intend to spend $1.7 billion, but we intend to do so with the best possible results.

This would be my quote, "To ensure that only the very best projects in terms of cost effectiveness to achieve climate change goals actually get funded. We do not fund pet projects which might have a marginal climate change impact but do not have the cost effective nature that we think is necessary".

What we want on this side is cost effectiveness and maximum results for the dollars we spend.

Mr. Bob Mills (Red Deer, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, I think the minister will find he has a big lineup of people who know how to spend money, particularly on that side of the House.

What does he not understand about, "You cannot trust a Liberal with that money"? If he wants to keep that Kyoto slush fund all for himself, he should be afraid of the Minister of Industry, the Minister of Natural Resources and the Minister of Transport. Of course the finance minister keeps talking about how even the cities can get in on this money.

The environment minister has already wasted $1.7 billion on Kyoto and CO_2 has risen. How does he think this will lower—

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of the Environment.

Hon. David Anderson (Minister of the Environment, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I wonder whether the Alliance Party and its members actually understand that it was Liberal ministers who took this country from a $42 billion deficit into a surplus position and started to pay down the debt.

I wonder whether the hon. member understands that we have had six consecutive years of surplus while those Conservative governments and other countries have had continuously increasing debt and deficit. Does he understand that?

* * *

[*Translation*]

CANADIAN TELEVISION FUND

Ms. Christiane Gagnon (Québec, BQ): Mr. Speaker, in his budget the Minister of Finance announced the renewal of the Canadian television fund for two years, but for an annual sum of $75 million, while the minimum needed is $100 million.

How can the Minister of Justice, who is also the minister responsible for Quebec, say, according to *The Gazette*, that the Montreal economy will get a boost when the Canadian television fund was cut by 25%?

● (1450)

Ms. Carole-Marie Allard (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Canadian Heritage, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Canadian television fund was implemented in 1996 under an initiative by the Minister of Canadian Heritage. The Government of Canada is not the only contributor to this fund. The cable television and satellite broadcasting industries also contribute to it.

We are confident that the commitment by the Minister of Finance to renew the funding for two years will allow the fund to stay afloat, which is very good.

Ms. Christiane Gagnon (Québec, BQ): Mr. Speaker, Claire Samson, president and CEO of the Association des producteurs de films et de télévision du Québec said that she was extremely disappointed by the 25% cut. This represents a loss of roughly 200 hours of programming for Quebec and a few hundred direct and indirect jobs.

We are talking about 200 fewer hours of production. Is that a new way of stimulating Quebec's economy and production in Quebec and Canada?

Ms. Carole-Marie Allard (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Canadian Heritage, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, on the contrary, I think that the Minister of Finance's commitment to give $75 million to the Fund over two years will guarantee a secure future and a bright future for Canadian programming production.

THE BUDGET

Mr. Scott Reid (Lanark—Carleton, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, Quebec's political forces have expressed their opposition to the federal budget. The PQ's minister of finance, the leader of the ADQ and even the finance critic of Quebec's Liberal Party all expressed their total disapproval of the federal government's interference in provincial jurisdiction.

Why does the minister not trust the provinces to administer programs for health, families, social housing and education?

Hon. Stéphane Dion (President of the Queen's Privy Council for Canada and Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, two things. First, we have full confidence in our ability to establish cooperation with the provinces. That is what we have done in recent years in all of the areas the member mentioned.

Second, if he wants to know what Quebeckers think of the federal budget, he will find out during the next election.

Mr. Scott Reid (Lanark—Carleton, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, if the minister respected the provinces, he would give them the trust they deserve.

The Liberals' funding promises are packaged in a way that could be taken back in the next budget, or after the next election.

Why does the minister refuse to allocate funds in the form of additional tax points, which is the only way to guarantee stable and long-term funding for social programs?

Hon. Stéphane Dion (President of the Queen's Privy Council for Canada and Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member's proposal would take away some $350 million from Pauline Marois, who is the minister of finance for Quebec.

Tax points are taken into account when calculating transfers to the provinces. This helps the have-not provinces. That is why tax points exist and the provinces must take this into consideration.

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HIGHWAY INFRASTRUCTURE

Mr. Jacques Saada (Brossard—La Prairie, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am sure the Minister of Transport will forgive us our relentless desire to see an agreement finally reached on the completion of highway 30. Many rumours have been going around in the past few hours.

My question is very simple. Could the Minister of Transport confirm that the negotiations are progressing, and that an agreement on the completion of highway 30 can be expected very shortly? Is there finally reason to be optimistic about the completion of highway 30?

Hon. David Collenette (Minister of Transport, Lib.): Yes, Mr. Speaker. I understand my hon. colleague's interest in the highway 30 issue. As I have explained on several occasions, this is a priority for the Government of Canada. We have offered $150 million so that the work can start sooner.

We are also working together with the infrastructure office and with the Province of Quebec to find a solution. I think one will soon be found.

[*English*]

HOMELESSNESS

Mr. Peter Goldring (Edmonton Centre-East, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, $753 million was spent over three years, supposedly to help the homeless. It could have helped build 30,000 homes for homeless people but it built none. Shelter space is no more than when the program began. The homeless count is up nationally by 40%. Transit stations were open for emergency shelter and a man died this winter in Red Deer.

This colossal failure to help the homeless is a shameful risk of human lives. Will the finance minister call for a review of the homeless funding wastage before committing more money?

● (1455)

Hon. Claudette Bradshaw (Minister of Labour, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the next day after the budget I received a call from the president of the Federation of Canadian Municipalities saying how happy he was that we had renewed the funding to homelessness. He represents every mayor and councillor in 61 communities. Community organizations in 61 communities have let me know how happy they were.

On Monday I opened Ron Kolbus House in Ottawa where there are 22 apartment units. We are helping the homeless and we will continue to help the homeless.

Mr. Peter Goldring (Edmonton Centre-East, Canadian Alliance): Well, the mayors are happy, Mr. Speaker, but are the homeless people happy?

Only a Liberal would applaud waste and three years of spending with no real improvements. Only Liberals would applaud the failure of one of its own ministers.

If the money did not create homes, more shelter space, and lower the homeless numbers, where did the $753 million go?

Hon. Claudette Bradshaw (Minister of Labour, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, how dare the hon. member talk about waste when he talks about homeless people.

I have two pages of funding that went to community based organizations in the hon. member's riding. It went to the Aboriginal Partners and Youth Society in the form of apartments, and the Edmonton City Centre Church Corporation in the form of transitional boarding houses. I have two pages.

* * *

[*Translation*]

THE BUDGET

Mr. Yvan Loubier (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Bloc Quebecois asked for a lower federal excise tax rate for microbreweries, to help them compete with large Canadian breweries and with foreign microbreweries. This measure was also recommended in the prebudget report of the Standing Committee on Finance.

The Minister of Finance chose to ignore the committee's unanimous recommendations. Could he tell us why?

Hon. John Manley (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I accepted two thirds of the recommendations made by the Standing Committee on Finance, whether in whole or in part. I think that it is not so bad for the parliamentary committee.

[*English*]

Mr. Jim Pankiw (Saskatoon—Humboldt, Ind.): Mr. Speaker, when a person moves between jobs the employer and employee begin paying a new set of payroll deductions. This results in overpayments to the Canada pension plan and employment insurance. Employees get their overpayments back at tax time but employers do not. This taxation by stealth costs businesses $750 million each year.

Why did the finance minister's budget fail to stop this unfair tax grab? Employees get their overpayments back, why do employers not?

Hon. John Manley (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I reviewed this issue with a number of representatives of small business who, by the way, have been expressing, quite clearly, their satisfaction with the budget of Tuesday where a number of measures were put forward that met their requests.

On this one, it is, at this point in time, rather difficult to contemplate what kind of system could repay employers without divulging information that is private with respect to the activities of their employees.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Jocelyne Girard-Bujold (Jonquière, BQ): Mr. Speaker, according to the Federation of Canadian Municipalities, an amount of $57 billion is needed to repair sewers, treat waste water, or develop public transit in our cities.

How can the Minister of Finance be taken seriously when he claims to want to improve the quality of life of Canadians if he only allocates $100 million, for one year, when $57 billion is needed?

Hon. John Manley (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am taking note of the hon. member's request that the federal government get involved in the jurisdictions of the other levels of government.

* * *

● (1500)

[*English*]

FIREARMS REGISTRY

Mr. Gerald Keddy (South Shore, PC): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Justice has promised for months to present an action plan on how he will fix the gun registry.

Are the people writing the action plan the same ones who ran up the registry's billion dollar debt? And, when will the minister table his action plan?

Hon. Martin Cauchon (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, if the hon. member had been following the file he would know exactly what we have been doing since the tabling of the Auditor General's report before Christmas.

We asked KPMG to table a report. As well, we asked Raymond Hession to table another report. At the present time we are looking at 16 recommendations in Mr. Hession's report.

The system is actually working. We have to improve the system to be more precise on the management side. We want to fix the problem. We will have a good gun control program in Canada for the safety of all Canadians.

* * *

AGRICULTURE

Mr. David Anderson (Cypress Hills—Grasslands, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, the Liberal government has repeatedly demonstrated to Canadians that it has become arrogant, self-serving and dictatorial. Now it is at it again.

We are witnessing the public spectacle of the government ramming agricultural policy down the throats of producers. The minister insists that his new agricultural policy framework must take effect on April 1 even though producer organizations across the country vigorously and unanimously oppose his arbitrary deadline.

If farm policy is for farmers, why is he ramming it through without their consent?

Hon. Lyle Vanclief (Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member knows full well that the present provincial and federal agreements end at the end of March.

The government will not stand by and have the situation happen where there is no disaster program for farmers for this year; no federal co-operation and no money going to farmers through the federal-provincial programs for not only business risk management but for food safety and the environment.

The industry and the provincial ministers and government have been working on this for 18 months. We need to get it done for farmers by the first of April of this year.

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BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Mr. John Reynolds (West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, would the government House leader advise the House as to what the business will be for the remainder of today, tomorrow and next week?

Also, in view of all the legislation the opposition parties have passed so well today, has he sent e-mails off to Mexico to advise the senators that it is time to get back to work?

Hon. Don Boudria (Minister of State and Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I will not interfere in the correspondence between those who have and those who have not been working over recent weeks.

This afternoon we will return to the second reading of Bill C-24, the elections finance bill. We would then call Bill C-20, the child protection bill. We would then move to Bill C-23 respecting a registry for certain offenders. I understand that there would be an interest on the part of some hon. members that after the initial speech by the parliamentary secretary we would adjourn the debate for the convenience of some members.

Tomorrow we will deal with Bill C-13 respecting reproductive technologies. I am still uncertain about one additional item, mainly that of the Senate amendments to Bill C-12, the sports bill. I will get back to hon. members later to see if we can deal with this item tomorrow, but that is still uncertain at this time.

Monday shall be an allotted day. On Tuesday and Wednesday we shall resume the budget debate.

Thursday and Friday of next week will be on legislation that we have before us. I will be speaking with House leaders early in the week to adjust that in view of the tremendous progress made on legislation this day to which the hon. House leader of the opposition in the House referred to earlier.

I wish to conclude by thanking all hon. members for the progress on legislation so far this day.

● (1505)

Mr. Loyola Hearn (St. John's West, PC): Mr. Speaker, there has been agreement by all parties that on Wednesday of next week there will be a take note debate on the fisheries. I did not hear the member mention it in his oration.

Hon. Don Boudria: Mr. Speaker, members have in fact raised the issue of two take note debates for next Wednesday. A number of members have asked that we have a take note debate on fisheries, that is true, but a number of members have approached me personally to see if we could have a further take note debate on Iraq.

I will be contacting members and will attempt tomorrow to clarify where the greater level of interest is. By tomorrow I would hope to update the House on this issue.

Mr. Loyola Hearn: Mr. Speaker, I am at a loss. At the meeting of House leaders, every party being represented, there was full agreement for a debate on fisheries generally. Is the member telling us that after we make decisions and agreements, we can run around behind the curtains and come up with something else?

The Speaker: I think the negotiations among the House leaders ought to take place outside the Chamber rather than in here. While I am sure the hon. member feels he has a point to make, I am sure he can make it elsewhere and I do not think we need to get into this kind of discussion on the floor. Question period after all is over.

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POINTS OF ORDER

FIREARMS PROGRAM

Mr. Garry Breitkreuz (Yorkton—Melville, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, in the last two days there have been articles in the newspapers that question the facts as stated in your ruling with respect to the question of privilege by the hon. member for Sarnia—Lambton. The Speaker said, and I would like to quote your words:

> Practically speaking, what occurred on December 5, 2002 was that the additional funding being requested for the Canadian firearms program was withdrawn from the package of supplementary estimates that was finally approved. This still left the Canadian firearms program with the original $113.5 million authorized by the House last June in the main estimates. That may not have been what some hon. members understood to be the case, but that is exactly what happened.

Officials from the justice department and the Treasury Board told the media that this was factually incorrect.

Would the Speaker be able to provide the House with clarification of this important issue?

The Speaker: The Chair will look into the matter and come back to the House, I hope very shortly, with the facts and figures that we relied on in making the ruling which I believe was amply supported by the documentary evidence that was tabled in the House and will refer the hon. member to it in due course.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[*English*]

CANADA ELECTIONS ACT

The House resumed consideration of the motion that Bill C-24, an act to amend the Canada Elections Act and the Income Tax Act (political financing), be read the second time and referred to a committee, and of the amendment and of the amendment to the amendment.

Mr. Gary Lunn (Saanich—Gulf Islands, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to speak to Bill C-24 on behalf of all my constituents of Saanich—Gulf Islands.

I have to admit that I am absolutely puzzled and greatly amazed at how the Prime Minister, after spending close to 40 years in this place, all of a sudden has decided that he wants the taxpayers to fund political parties, although I agree that there were problems with how political parties received contributions in the past.

It absolutely boggles the mind when we get into the details of what the government, the Prime Minister and the Liberal Party is promoting in the bill. I will get into some of those details. After being here for almost six years, I am actually stunned that the government would even present a bill such as this.

I will go over a few of the details of exactly what Bill C-24 proposes. First, the Prime Minister has stated that the government is trying to limit union and political donations to political parties. This is something that I do not think is all that bad of an idea. It is something I could actually go along with.

However the Prime Minister tries to hide behind that veil, that this is about restricting corporate and union donations. That is the furthest thing from the truth in the bill as far as I read it. This is about taking $100 million of taxpayer money and forcing taxpayers to give that to political parties. I will get into some of the details of exactly how that is done.

Right now there is a tax credit of up to 75% for political donations to political candidates. The government would be doubling that limit to $400 from $200 for individuals. I will get into the impact of that in a minute.

Election expenses for political parties during an election now receive a 22.5% rebate on allowable expenses, which I say is questionable. If the government actually wanted to fix that it could have talked about eliminating all these rebates. What is worse, the government has now more than doubled that rebate up to 50%.

What would happen if someone in my riding wanted to donate $400 to any candidate in a political election? Let us say that the person wanted to donate $400 to my campaign. At the end of that campaign it would cost the taxpayer $300 immediately because that person would get a 75% cash rebate on his or her income tax.

When I spend that $400 during the election, I get a 50% rebate, another $200 when I spend that $400. What would that cost the taxpayer? When someone donates $400 to my campaign it would cost the taxpayer $500 right off the top, not to mention all the bureaucracy and all the cost of processing it which would add more.

That is unconscionable and wrong. Political parties would be in much the same boat. People would receive receipts and then receive a tax credit on their income tax when they donated to political parties. Those political parties would have their election expenses increased to 50% when they were at 22.5%, which would be more than double.

The other thing is that in order to be eligible for those rebates, which again would go mostly to major political parties, the parties would need to receive at least 15% of the vote. The government decided that was not enough so it has lowered that to 10%.

● (1510)

This is the frustrating part of the bill. The government is hiding behind the veil that it is about limiting or regulating corporate and union donations. We have heard a number of ministers say that they have undue influence and put pressure on the government. They place pressure on the government and obviously the cabinet, the executive branch of the government. We cannot legislate integrity. We cannot legislate honesty.

It is mind boggling what the Prime Minister has come up with after 40 years in this place. I do not know if he has a scorched earth policy. He knows he is leaving in a year. Perhaps he is trying to blow up everything behind him as he leaves this place and make it the most miserable place he can as he expects the member for LaSalle—Émard will be his successor. I have no idea what his motives are.

When we follow his rationale, it boggles the mind. The Prime Minister, the member from Shawinigan, would argue that it is unfair to have the money of shareholders and unionized workers contributed without their consent. There is a rationale that it is not right if unions donate money to political parties without their members' consent. Imagine, it is not right if corporations donate money to political parties without their shareholders' consent.

Who in heck does he think the taxpayers are? They are the shareholders of the public purse. Is it okay to donate their money, to give their money, $100 million in an electoral cycle, to political parties without their consent?

It is ridiculous that this bill is even before the House. We wonder why there is so much cynicism politics. The government spends $400 million to $450 million a day. That is the amount of the federal budget. There is $164.5 billion for this year. Divide that by 365. I have not done the math but it is around $450 million a day.

And this is how the government chooses to spend it after we have witnessed a billion dollar fiasco in the gun registry, after we have witnessed the Groupaction advertising contracts, after we have witnessed the Department of Human Resources Development Canada billion dollar boondoggle. The members across the way laugh and make jokes. It is not a laughing matter when they fritter away billions and billions of dollars in one department after another, from the justice department to HRDC to public works with the advertising contracts. Of course, all of the departments are trying to funnel money into the Prime Minister's riding.

It is wrong. It is absolutely unconscionable that the government even has the courage to bring this bill forward and have its members stand up in the House and suggest that it is okay.

The frustrating part is that the government is trying to hide behind the veil that it does not want to have undue influence from unions and corporations. That is a joke. If we look at the money and follow some of the donations to the Liberal Party and then look at the contracts that are awarded and the grants that are given out, of course the public is cynical about what is going on.

I am absolutely appalled by this legislation. I think it is wrong even though the biggest beneficiary would be the Canadian Alliance.

● (1515)

I will conclude by saying this is about $100 million of taxpayers' money. The government has forced it on the political parties and increased the rebate and it is dead wrong. The government should be looking at eliminating the rebates.

Again I am at a loss for words on how bad this is. It is nothing short of stealing money, taking it from the pockets of Canadian taxpayers. It is wrong. I am opposed to it. I urge every member not to follow in the Prime Minister's wake.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Christiane Gagnon (Québec, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to speak today. As we know, this is an important bill, which seeks to democratize political party financing. Contrary to the assertions of the hon. Canadian Alliance members, the government's efforts must be encouraged, although the bill does not go as far as the Bloc Quebecois would have liked. However, it is a step in the right direction. I will come back to the reservations that we have with regard to the bill and any amendments.

Since 1993, the Bloc Quebecois has demanded legislation that better defines contributions to political parties. This is the purpose of this bill.

This bill raises an important debate since it also has implications for the credibility of the political class. We are all concerned by the government's initiative to change the rules of the party financing game.

Currently, at the federal level, political parties can get astronomical sums from banks, big unions, businesses or large corporations. In this respect, we know quite well what is going on. A party can find itself in an awkward situation if a law threatens the interests of these major donors or large corporations.

That is why we must at least support the principle of this bill. We all recognize the different lobbies that exist in order to pressure influential ministers in their decisions regarding the passage of certain regulations and bills.

I do not believe that contributions of $200,000 are made to a political party or a minister because he or she has lovely eyes or is awfully nice. You would have to be terribly naive to think such a thing.

The Prime Minister wanted to take a page from the book of the former late Premier of Quebec, René Levesque, who wanted to democratize political financing and exclude all these lobbies of powerful large associations from the circles of power. He wanted to prevent them from controlling the decisions made within the government. He also wanted to give citizens a more important place and the same power enjoyed by major corporations, that is, the power to influence governments in their decision-making.

We could also mention the whole sponsorship scandal. This is a concrete example of the government's lack of integrity. It awarded contracts to companies that gave generously to the Liberal Party's coffers. Most of them were caught with their hands in the cookie jar and were charged.

I think this bill can do something about companies that help parties get elected. Once elected, the government is obliged to return the favour, and often has to listen to them when setting policy.

Financing is something so significant that the measures relating to it need to be beefed up, so that these major corporations do not get all manner of privileges because of their contributions.

We are aware, for instance, that big business often helps with political party advertising and does such things as pay staff and provide some compensation for volunteers. Major corporations lend staff to help get political parties elected. They also pay for material or equipment, and I could go on with more examples.

Often, not all these expenses are included in the accounting, but we all know how an election campaign is run and how certain services rendered can be paid for under the table.

With the support of major corporations, a party's campaign coffers are really full, and thus a better party image can be projected, with more and better advertising, the right staff and so on.

This bill is a step in the right direction, because its intent is to put an end to this way of doing things. We all suffer the fallout of all these scandals. Often all politicians are tarred with the same brush. I am pleased that this bill offers us the opportunity to debate this matter.

● (1520)

We know that some large corporations use their influence to make the government change its mind when the time comes to implement certain policies. In Quebec, similar legislation was adopted 25 years ago, and we should certainly be pleased that former Premier René Lévesque took concrete action to put an end to these practices.

There is also the whole issue of fairness. We are well aware that, during an election campaign, some political figures—I am tempted to say male political figures—often benefit more than others from financing. Women often tell us that they have some problems with financing, with getting funds. They often do not have the same connections with large corporations.

So, this greater fairness will allow ordinary people, including people who are involved in areas other than the economic sector, to have access to financing. Creating a level playing field will ensure that financing is similar for everyone, as opposed to having some benefit from donations made by large corporations.

As we know, when a person was a minister in a government, that person benefits from it, because large corporations are attracted to these people and they give lots of money to the party.

Still, we have some reservations about this bill. It does not go far enough and we hope that the government will take these reservations into consideration.

The limit for contributions made by individuals to political parties is $10,000. The Bloc Quebecois feels that the limit set in the bill is much too high. We think that it should be set at $5,000, which is the limit set in the bylaws of the Bloc Quebecois.

● (1525)

In Quebec, the most recent data shows that the $3,000 ceiling is enough to meet public financing objectives. Indeed, in 2001, only 1.2% of the contributions made to political parties in Quebec were in the $2,000 to $3,000 range. We also feel that a $5,000 limit would be enough to meet the same objectives at the federal level.

Another problem with the bill before us is that a corporation will be allowed to donate to riding associations, candidates or nomination contestants, up to a maximum of $1,000 per year for all of these entities.

In terms of the principles, we do not understand this exception. Indeed, we fully support the principle of public financing and this part does not respect that principle. In other words, there should be a complete ban on corporate donations, as is the case in Quebec's legislation.

We believe that in practice the new rules will be difficult to enforce, both for political parties and for companies themselves. The legislation will be hard to enforce.

For example, company X in Montreal may give a party's candidate $1,000. In that same year, a subsidiary company, located in Vancouver—and owned indirectly by the first company—may give another $1,000 to a local riding association of the same party. This situation would only be discovered after long and careful research, by comparing the financial reports of the national party with those of the riding association. Also, the person doing the research would have to know that company Y is a subsidiary, owned indirectly by company X.

As a result, given that we support a complete ban on corporate donations, we think that in practice, the $1,000 contribution limit is unacceptable.

Another provision of this new bill deals with the responsibility to produce financial reports, which applies to all of the political actors: candidates, political parties, riding associations, leadership candidates and nomination candidates.

Also, I hope that the Liberal Party will be open when it comes to considering the reservations that we have regarding this bill. Our suggestions could improve it and help the bill to meet its objective, a better democratization of the financing of political parties.

We hope that the government will be open to this and demonstrate its good faith. If the government wants to meet this objective, it can do so with the amendments that will be introduced by the opposition parties.

* * *

● (1530)

[*English*]

POINTS OF ORDER

FIREARMS PROGRAM—SPEAKER'S RULING

The Speaker: Before proceeding with debate, I wish to answer the question raised earlier by the hon. member for Yorkton—Melville in respect of the figures used by the Speaker in his ruling on the matter of the gun registry earlier this week.

First I would point out that the estimates of the Department of Justice for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2003, indicated that there were two votes, one for operating expenditures and one for grants and contributions: operating expenditures, $325,464,000, and grants and contributions, $398,715,000.

Tabled with the estimates were part III of the estimates, the "Report on Plans and Priorities" of the Department of Justice. Within that report, the plans, priorities and strategic outcomes listed in section III on page 11 indicate that planned spending for the firearms control program was $113.5 million.

If the figure that is stated in the part IIIs is not the correct figure, that in fact the amount contained in the main estimates was less than $113.5 million, there is no way that the Speaker could be aware of the fact that it was not so contained. We rely on the documents that are tabled in this House.

As hon. members know, the Auditor General of Canada has made comments about transparency in respect of figures used by this particular department in relation to this particular program. If there is a discrepancy between the figures that I have quoted and what the department says was in fact intended to be included in the main estimates and what was intended to be in the supplementary estimates, I can only suggest that the matter be resolved in the committee.

I point out the following in regard to the standing committees of the House, and I will be selective in my quote from Standing Order 108, which states in part that:

> The standing committees...shall, in addition to the powers granted to them pursuant to section (1) of this Standing Order...be empowered to study and report on all matters relating to the mandate, management and operation of the department or departments of government which are assigned to them from time to time by the House. In general, the committees shall be severally empowered to review and report on...the immediate, medium and long-term expenditure plans and the effectiveness of implementation of same by the department;...[and] other matters, relating to the mandate, management, organization or operation of the department, as the committee deems fit.

So I would suggest to the hon. member that if the statements that he has obtained or has seen quoted in the media indicate there is a discrepancy in the figures upon which the Speaker is relying in giving his ruling based on the documents that have been tabled in the House and what the actual figures may or may not be, and he has some justification for thinking that, I think, in light of the statements made and in light of the comments of the Auditor General, I would suggest he take the matter up with the committee at the earliest opportunity.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[*English*]

CANADA ELECTIONS ACT

The House resumed consideration of the motion that Bill C-24, an act to amend the Canada Elections Act and the Income Tax Act (political financing), be read the second time and referred to a committee, and of the amendment and of the amendment to the amendment.

Mr. Ted White (North Vancouver, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, I rise to say a few words about Bill C-24. Incidentally it is a very thick bill, about half an inch thick, and I know you are a busy man, Mr. Speaker, so you probably have not had the time to glance through it yet, but I have read it from cover to cover. Whilst it is half an inch thick, a lot of it is repetitive, repeating the same clauses over and over for nomination meetings, for registration of electoral district associations or for leadership races. Much of it is repeated.

In speaking to Bill C-24, I would like to reference Bill C-2, which was the bill on the major changes to the Canada Elections Act, which took place a couple of years ago, a bill for which I was critic and moved it through the House over about a three month period.

When Bill C-2 was going through the House, I proposed on behalf of the Canadian Alliance that we put an end to the patronage appointments of Elections Canada whereby the government appoints all of the returning officers and most of the field staff for Elections Canada. The Chief Electoral Officer had begged us to allow him to select and appoint his own staff, because it is completely inappropriate for the governing party to be appointing key personnel in what is supposed to be an independent body. The minister at the time argued that this was a ridiculous suggestion because it would cost too much and increase the bureaucracy at Elections Canada, and therefore we should not waste our money on it.

However, when we look at Bill C-24, what do we find? An enormous bureaucracy being set up to register and track the reports of electoral district associations. I have already spoken with the Ontario chief electoral officer because Ontario does have exactly this type of system, and it is very intensely administrative in nature. It requires enormous amounts of paperwork. It requires elections people to follow up constantly with riding associations or electoral districts to get the paperwork done. This is going to cost much more and be much more complicated than anything that was proposed to get rid of patronage in Bill C-2, so I really think the minister was playing politics at the time.

In Bill C-24, the government is also setting up a very complicated process for nominations. The government has argued that what it is trying to do is level the playing field to make it easier for disadvantaged people to take advantage of the possibility of becoming candidates for political parties.

I am convinced that most of the government members have not bothered to read the bill. They probably took a look at the half inch thickness and decide not to attempt it. However, if we really read the bill we will see that there are at least 15 pages of requirements for people getting involved in a nomination meeting. Now if we are talking about people who are traditionally disadvantaged, for example, as they would argue, women in the community who may not have the business contacts to help them get big donations to start a nomination meeting, those same people will not have the contacts who have the accounting skills or the management skills to run the sort of paperwork that is required for a nomination race.

So I would argue that the government is very misguided in what it has done in this bill and I think again it is playing politics. What it is actually trying to do, while it pretends to be arguing in favour of the disadvantaged, is creating a situation whereby those people will be excluded. It will be restricted to people who have the business contacts, the skills and the ability to manage a very complicated nomination race procedure.

The bill also perpetuates the unfair 50 candidate rule, which requires parties, in order to be registered and to have registered riding associations, to run 50 candidates in an election. The courts have struck down that provision. They have said that it is unfair and that it is inappropriate. In discussions in this House and in committee, all of the parties except the Liberal Party agreed that number 12 would be appropriate, which is the number that is recognized in the House as being appropriate for recognition of party status. So again the government is perpetuating unfair, anti-democratic practices while it still argues out of the other side of its mouth that the bill is an improvement.

It has also continued to maintain the gag law in the bill. That is the part of the Canada Elections Act that prevents third parties from arguing their perspective during election campaigns. The gag law has been struck down three times in the courts, yet the minister, even as late as yesterday, was still arguing that it was appropriate to keep that gag law in the Elections Act.

● (1535)

He has wasted tens of millions of dollars fighting it in the courts. It gets struck down every time. He argues that the basis for putting the gag law back into the Elections Act is that there was a court ruling in Quebec which justified the use of a gag law and restrictions on spending of third parties.

What he fails to say every time he quotes that Quebec court judgment is that the judgment was about referenda, not elections. Referenda, Mr. Speaker, as I am sure you know, are about either a yes or a no answer. They are about one issue and the answer is either yes or no. It seems perfectly reasonable that we might put limits on who can argue for a yes and who can argue for a no in order to have a level playing field with both groups having access to the same amount of resources and money, but an election is a multi-faceted event with numerous issues, some of which are local and some of which are national, and there are literally hundreds of thousands of different issues that need to be argued.

To try to transpose a court ruling in Quebec to do with referenda into a general election status in this bill is completely inappropriate. The minister knows it. I have begged him to stop wasting taxpayers' money on these court cases and he continues to do it. In fact, he is a disgrace because he has wasted money on the gag law and he is now going to waste enormous amounts of money on a complicated process for nomination meetings. During all of that time he accuses us of trying to waste money by putting real democracy into the act, by getting rid of the patronage appointments that the Prime Minister does for Elections Canada.

Incidentally, there are returning officers who do not turn up to work at Elections Canada and the Chief Electoral Officer is unable to do anything about it. Unless he can convince the governor in council, which means the Prime Minister, to cancel the appointment of one of his cronies to the returning officer position, there is nothing that can be done. The end result is that incompetent party hacks get appointed to the positions in Elections Canada that should be filled by skilled people who are non-partisan.

I would like to urge the government to be open to considering changes in the bill. Perhaps I am being a little naive, because the bill is going to be rammed through and we all know that. We are going get this public funding whether we agree with it or not. But I would hope that the government might be open to taking a look at a fairer way of allocating the public funding. The way that it is set up at the moment, the funding is given on the basis of the number of votes that were achieved by a party in the past election. Really, that rewards past electoral success and not necessarily the popularity of the party as it stands at the present time.

I heard a very creative suggestion, for example, and I am not putting this forward as CA policy at this time, it is just a creative suggestion that I heard, which was that maybe it would be fairer to base the funding on the number of registered electoral districts that a party has.

For example, for every registered electoral district that a party could maintain across the country, it would receive a certain allocation of funds. That would make it fair because it would reward parties that were trying to become national in scope. It certainly would not be a disadvantage to the ruling Liberal Party because it maintains riding associations, or electoral districts, in every riding in the country so its allocation would be exactly the same. Parties like the Canadian Alliance, which is gradually establishing riding associations across the country, would also gain benefits as it established these, and it would really make a judgment about how serious a party was at being a national player. For parties like the Bloc that tend to be restricted to one region, it would not penalize them either, because it would be running electoral districts or associations in every riding in that province and so it would still get its allocation.

That seems to me, just on the surface of it, perhaps a fairer way of doing it. If we really must have public money put into this, I would hope the government might be open to suggestions like that from outside interests.

In closing, I will say that I think the bill is pretty badly flawed. There has not been much chance in 10 minutes to get into the real meat of it, but I will repeat my hope that the government would be open to some further suggestions in committee as to how we might improve the bill.

● (1540)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Jocelyne Girard-Bujold (Jonquière, BQ): Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure for me to speak today on Bill C-24, the purpose of which is to change political party financing.

From the outset, I want to say that the Liberal government has finally seen the light at the end of the tunnel. Quebec adopted similar legislation over 25 years ago.

So, before I go into the substance of my remarks, I would like to inform the hon. member of the Canadian Alliance who just spoke, as well as the hon. member who preceded him, that we heard the same thing in Quebec in 1976 and 1977 from the opposition parties. They objected to the financing system that Quebec has had in place for over 25 years now.

I would invite the hon. member to come to Quebec. He says that this bill will create paperwork, but this is not true. There is never too high a price to pay for democracy and transparency. Why do people criticize our governments so much these days, be it Liberal or otherwise? The whole sponsorship scandal was an example of a lack of transparency. The government's cronies had contributed to a slush fund.

After 25 years, Mr. Blanchet, the Chief Electoral Officer of Quebec, said that the legislation in Quebec had an extraordinarily positive impact. Looking back on 25 years, he said that although it is wonderful, there is still room for improvement. It is still a work in progress.

It is time for this government to say to Canadian voters, "The time has come to turn the machine off, to stop having secret slush funds and to start being accountable to the Canadian public who finances us".

In 1997, my colleague, the member for Laurier—Sainte-Marie, the current leader of the Bloc Quebecois, introduced a motion in this House saying that the Liberal Party of Canada should establish a public financing system. I will read the wording of the motion introduced on October 9, 1997:

> That this House condemns the attitude of the Government, which refuses to introduce in-depth reform of the legislation on the financing of federal political parties even though the existing legislation allows for a wide range of abuses.

In 1994, my colleague from Bas-Richelieu—Nicolet—Bécancour introduced a motion in this House that said:

> That, in the opinion of this House, the government should bring in legislation limiting solely to individuals the right to donate to a federal political party, and restricting such donations to a maximum of $5,000 a year.

This means that nine years later, the government, through the Prime Minister, finally saw the light at the end of the tunnel. I give credit to the Prime Minister of Canada, who gave credit to a great visionary, the former Premier of Quebec, the late René Lévesque. He was indeed a visionary. He believed that all political parties should be financed through the sale of $5 membership cards. This way, every taxpayer could say, "No one is more influential than I am". This is another way of saying, "My hands are not tied".

It is regrettable that the legislation will not apply to the Liberal leadership race. Imagine the amount of money that must be pouring into the Liberal coffers right now. This legislation should have been made retroactive to January 1, 2003. That is the amendment I would like to see made to the bill, to show that the Prime Minister wants to be transparent to the very end. I commend his political courage.

● (1545)

Over the holiday season, people in Jonquière were asking me, "Jocelyne, what will you say about the bill the Prime Minister will be introducing?" I told them that I would congratulate him, because it was high time that similar legislation was introduced. He may have looked at the bigger picture because he is about to leave and wants to leave a positive legacy. It is never too late to do a good thing. He may have acted late, but he acted, and that is worth pointing out.

I think we can never raises objections about what this might cost. And there is democracy to think about. There has been a lot of talk about democracy, lately. Reference has been made to the popularity of politicians. I have heard that we politicians are less popular than car salesmen. Imagine that.

If this bill enhances our credibility with our voters, that is great; I applaud that. I would like the Alliance members to visit Quebec—I will gladly go with them—to see how we have been doing things for the past 26 years, and how great and transparent our democratic system is.

Our system is not perfect, you know. The other day, I met the government House leader in the elevator, and he told me, "I have checked in Quebec. We have drawn great inspiration from the Quebec legislation". I say way to go.

We are not all bad, we have some good points as well. But there are some irritants in this bill, for instance the appointment of returning officers. I have always found the way this is done very disturbing. In Quebec they are selected by competition. This is all part of a democratic election.

On the federal level, returning officers for a riding have a political affiliation. I find that reprehensible. I hope that this government will accept these amendments relating to partisan appointments. If the Election Act is revised, it must be done thoroughly so that the credibility of returning officers is improved.

I have always been active in Quebec elections and have always been very close to the returning officers because I knew they were apolitical. They could of course vote as their conscience dictated, but at least I knew they had been appointed by a democratic process.

I feel that this part of the bill is serious and that the government House leader must, if he wishes to show good faith, revise the part relating to these appointments.

Then there are the contribution ceilings. We in the Bloc Quebecois, like the Parti Quebecois, feel these should not exceed $3,000 per individual.

This is a great victory. Today we can say it is a victory for a sovereignist party serving in Ottawa, which has told the federal government and federal politicians that it is high time political parties got their funding from individuals and were not held hostage by large corporations.

I congratulate the government once again. The Bloc Quebecois will be there to help improve this bill. I do, however, feel this is an excellent step forward. I congratulate the Bloc Quebecois members who were part of it.

● (1550)

Mr. Marcel Gagnon (Champlain, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I would like to say just a few words. I do not intend to use up all my time, but I did not want to let this opportunity go by.

There have been many references to René Lévesque and the Quebec legislation, which was a model for this bill. This brings back fond memories. When that legislation was passed, I was an MNA in Quebec, and I had the opportunity to discuss the reform of political parties and electoral reform.

My colleague from Jonquière reminded us that the Act to govern the financing of political parties gave rise to strong feelings when it was introduced. Clearly, opposition parties thought it was a senseless revolution. They raised the spectre of the administrative costs of implementing this legislation. A moment ago, a member said just about the same thing. As if there could be too high a price to pay for democracy.

Patronage comes at a terrible price. And we never even know just how terrible it is. The sponsorship scandal is a good example. Just imagine what we could find out. This is just the tip of the patronage iceberg.

Of course, there will be administrative costs associated with legislation on political party financing, but that is the price of democracy. It is wrong to say that this act is an expensive one to administer in Quebec. It has saved taxpayers lots of money.

The advantage is that, since then, Quebec taxpayers can say that they own their government. This is what democracy is all about. Individuals led by the government they elected know what that government is going to do, or at least should do according to their wishes.

However, the current anarchistic financing system means that big business, major unions and powerful people with the money to invest are the ones contributing to political parties. If they give money to political parties, you know that it is because it pays, because they get back ten times or more what they gave.

When I hear people argue that this kind of legislation is costly to administer, I think that this is a short-sighted. I am convinced, if we think logically, that the cost of democracy, the cost of democratizing political parties, is infinitely cheaper than the cost of political patronage.

I heard a minister of this government defend the bill during a radio interview. She gave examples to explain just how much, at times, the government is connected to those contributing to its campaign fund.

I think that this bill is a step forward. It is 25 years behind Quebec, but it is a step forward that must be noted.

As a member of the Bloc Quebecois and former member of the Parti Quebecois in Quebec City who voted 25 years ago on Quebec's law, I must congratulate the government for taking this position. It is taking it a bit late, but better late than never. It is high time that this were done.

It is high time too that people in this country know that, as voters, we are now capable of owning the political parties that represent us and that the big corporations are not the owners of this political party and, finally, of the government.

We could have been more congratulatory but, unfortunately, the door to patronage has been left open for a little longer, until 2004.

● (1555)

I can just imagine the companies that are used to getting favours. My guess is that it must be pretty easy to fill up the coffers of the Liberal Party when there is a leadership race going on.

I think that if we wanted to go all the way in cleaning up political parties, we should have moved up the bill's coming into force. We should even have made the bill effective as soon as it was introduced in Parliament, in order to stop the abuse right now. Had we done so, the Liberal leadership race would have taken place under the principles set out in the bill, principles that will only apply much later.

I find it too bad that there is such a lengthy delay before the bill comes into force. We still have the opportunity to amend the bill so that it will be more than a wish list show that we are capable of walking the talk, and cleaning up our political and electoral practices.

There have been examples of patronage, such as the sponsorship scandal. I am sure that there are other examples we could give. They have cost this country quite a bit. As we are now making the effort to clean up our political parties, we should have started the process right away.

I would have liked the bill to come into effect much sooner. I also think that a $10,000 contribution to a political party is a lot of money. Most ordinary taxpayers cannot give a political party $10,000. In Quebec, the limit was set at $3,000. This would have been a good limit for this bill too.

I must recognize that this is a positive step. I hope the government will be generous enough to allow us to make amendments to this bill to make it even better in order to reassure voters that from now on, they will own their government even more.

It will not only be large corporations that will be able to exercise influence, but the voters will also be able to do so. By providing the funding themselves for political parties through taxes and contributions, they will have their say and there will be less risk of patronage.

Again, I applaud the government for this bill. I will give it my full support, as I did in Quebec's National Assembly when the legislation was passed there. However, give us the chance to improve it.

● (1600)

[*English*]

Mr. Loyola Hearn (St. John's West, PC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to take the opportunity to say a few words on the bill. It is one that I suppose a lot of us look at with mixed feelings. Most people in the House and all people outside of it have been looking forward for some time to cleaning up election financing. However we have to ask this question. Does the bill do anything about that or does it make it worse? There will certainly be arguments on both sides.

When people outside the House analyze the bill itself, they will note that they are being asked to finance political parties which are in existence. No provision is made for parties that are non-existent. It comes at a tremendous price. We are looking at roughly $20 million a year in contributions to the parties. No wonder the governing party is so interested in the bill because it would get the large share of the contribution.

Contributions will be based upon the amount of votes received in the last election. For a party that has a heavy debt, as does the Liberal Party, it will help pay off its debt and put it in very good shape. Other parties will not fare so well, although that part of it should not be the determining factor.

We should look at one thing. Why do we want to change the financing of elections? The first thing most people would say would be to make it transparent and clean it up. A lot of people think politicians and political parties are bought by big corporations, unions and, in some cases, perhaps individually bought by individuals who have significant dollars. That cleaning up and transparency has to be brought in.

I think most people would find it would be few and far between that large donations would be given to anybody except the governing party. Who can buy favours from our party, the NDP, the Bloc or even the Alliance? People might want to ingratiate themselves and make healthy contributions. However, if people looked at the contributors to most of our parties, I do not think they would be very concerned with influence peddling, regardless of what stripe the governing party was. It could be a different colour. That is the kind of stuff we need to clean up.

There is no doubt about the fact that there should be a limit on donations. However what that limit should be is a good question.

When I discussed the bill openly with people in my province, they asked me what the limits would be on donations. I told them that it would be $10,000 on a personal donation and $1,000 from corporations. They said to me that I had it mixed up, that surely it had to be $10,000 from corporations and perhaps $1,000 from an individual. I told them that was not the way the bill had been written.

To me it does not make a lot of sense to set a $10,000 limit from individuals and have a $1,000 limit from corporations. That is not reasonable. Certainly that amount could be significantly higher without people feeling the corporation is trying to buy favours.

We have to realize, as a lot of us do, that the majority of the companies do not try to buy favours. They are clean-cut, honest corporations and individuals. They contribute to political parties because they think those parties or individuals within parties are doing a good job. They want to ensure we continue to do our work. The only way to do that is to be re-elected, and to be re-elected costs money.

● (1605)

Reasonable donations made for the right reasons have always been a part of our system. There is absolutely nothing wrong with people, individually or collectively through their companies or unions, contributing to political parties, if it is within reason and it is done in a transparent manner so everybody knows where the money has comes from.

On the other hand, we also realize that the majority of politicians are honest individuals. They do not want to be bribed or bought and will reject any offers to try to influence their decisions.

That is not what a lot of people think. Just a couple of days ago I saw a poll on what people thought about different professions across the country and who was honest and who was not. Politicians of course came out on the bottom of the poll. People have a perception that politicians are there to get what they can out of it and to help the buddies who buy them.

That perception has to be cleaned up. The legislation does nothing to help out in that regard. Trust funds are not counted. Any contributions made before announcements have been made are not counted. Any specific individual, whether it be a leadership candidate or a party candidate, has all kinds of under the table ways of accumulating large sums of money that he or she can use. That will not be affected by the legislation.

I am not sure what the present legislation will do to help correct the problems that have to be corrected. The only thing of real significance is that it asks Canadians, who really finance everything that goes on in government anyway, to finance the election of members. Maybe people will say that by this they could ensure we were not being influenced by outside events, individuals or corporations. I do not think that is what they will to say. I think they will say that if a MP wants to be elected then go get elected and find any assistance that is needed. However in doing so, ensure that it is done properly, that is above board, that is transparent and that it is an honest process. The legislation does absolutely nothing to assure this.

I have absolutely no problem with the general idea that we have to make election financing accountable and transparent. The process in election financing and the financing of leadership races or anything else that is involved with those types of activities is what must be addressed and be addressed in a way that is right, proper, open and transparent.

If we do that, people will look at all of us here and say that we are here for the right reasons and that we have been elected through the right process. They will be able to say that they are proud to make a reasonable contribution and do not mind doing it openly. Then a lot of the misconceptions about politicians could be corrected. Maybe it is time we got down to doing it, instead of complicating the process which the legislation as it exists will do.

Hopefully through the House and through the committee these changes will be made. Then we will have a piece of legislation which we can all support by the time we finish.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron (Verchères—Les-Patriotes, BQ): Mr. Speaker, it is my pleasure to rise to debate Bill C-24 that we support, obviously, in principle. In this bill, there are numerous provisions that are light years away from the current political financing legislation.

Of course, substantial improvements could be made. I will give examples shortly. Nevertheless, I must first tip my hat to the government party for finally seeing the light on the road to Damascus and introducing some amendments to the federal electoral legislation, so that parliamentarians and political parties will no longer come under undue pressure from major contributors or, at least, so that parliamentarians and political parties will no longer appear to come under undue pressure from major contributors.

Nonetheless, I must say that it is easy to make amendments when they do not commit you to anything. I will come back to this later. The Prime Minister was careful to propose this amendment to the existing federal electoral legislation at the very end of his career, ensuring of course that the new provisions would not apply to the current Liberal leadership race that will decide his own successor.

It is interesting that the Prime Minister waited more than 35 years after his political career began to suddenly become the advocate for such an amendment to the Canada Elections Act.

Need I point out that since it was first elected in 1993—if we exclude the by-election in 1990—the Bloc Quebecois has not stopped pushing for the electoral legislation to be amended to include the principles of public financing in effect in Quebec.

Let us remember that public financing has two key components: first, contribution ceilings and second, a formal ban on anyone other than voters contributing financially to political parties.

The government has taken up a few provisions in these two pillars, but has vehemently opposed any kind of amendment that might have come from the pressure, proposals, amendments and motions by the Bloc Quebecois. The government has also been very careful to wait a few years before making these proposals, so that people might forget that these provisions had been moved by an opposition party.

That would be unthinkable. How could the government publicly admit that is way introducing legislation initially suggested by an oppossition party? The government saw to it that people would forget that the idea came from an opposition party and, all of a sudden, it takes it out of our hat and says, "We have just made an extraordinary discovery; we are proposing a legislative change that will be absolutely revolutionary and will ensure that, suddenly, our citizens trust our political institutions more".

Some discovery. Perhaps it would have been a good idea if the government had discovered it before. I guess that, on the Liberal side, it takes a few years before they finally take action.

Must I remind the House that the Bloc Quebecois made a number of proposals to this effect. In 1994, my colleague from Bas-Richelieu —Nicolet—Bécancour, who was then the member for Richelieu, moved a motion to this effect in the House. Of course, it was defeated, thanks to our colleagues in the governing party.

● (1610)

A little later on, in 1997, the present leader of the Bloc Quebecois, the member for Laurier—Sainte-Marie, also made a proposal along the same lines. When we debated Bill C-2 in the House and in committee, the Bloc Quebecois came back with a number of proposed amendments, which the government wasted no time rejecting.

Eloquent speeches were made in this House and in committee, in particular by the government House leader, as he was then also. He had a brief stint as Minister of Public Works and Government Services, but was not there long, for reasons known to us all. I will read some excerpts from the very wise comments made by the government House leader at that time.

In the House Procedure and Affairs Committee, the Government House Leader stated:

> The Lortie commission has recommended neither that only individuals be allowed to make contributions nor that a maximum be established for contributions. Moreover, where such rules do exist, two individuals sometimes make equivalent contributions right up to the limit in order to get around these constraints.

Really, now.

He subsequently answer a question by our colleague from Chicoutimi—Le Fjord, who had a different political allegiance at the time, and was then in favour of public financing—and still must be—and perhaps may have made a modest contribution to this change in attitude on the government side.

His answer to our colleague for Chicoutimi—Le Fjord was as follows.

> Corporations and individuals have virtually identical rights under the law. What a company can do legally as far as contributions are concerned, an individual can do also. The law does not treat them differently. It does not set higher ceilings for individuals than for unions or companies. Limits are the same for everyone. In other words, there is no ceiling in either category in terms of tax deductions. It is the same thing, provided it involves a taxpayer.

He said that there was equality between corporate and individual entities, as far as their ability to contribute to political parties was concerned.

Still in his answer, the government House leader said:

> The system is transparent. I think that it is also accountable—
>
> —as for banning contributions do not come from individuals that, this would be of very little benefit. Lortie said that it was so easy circumvent such a provision that it would not make sense. He may not have said it in those terms, but this is more or less what he meant.
>
> We know what is happening today. Instead of the corporation paying $1,000, the president contributes $500, the vice-president $300 and the secretary $200, which means that the end result is the same. The only difference is that the system is less transparent instead of being more transparent. We no longer know from whom the money is really coming. It is coming from obscure individuals, instead of coming from GM, Ford, or some other corporation.

The government House leader went on to say:

> Lortie also said that we would quickly use up the funds of political parties if we did that.

What caused this sudden about-face on the part of the government House leader? Why has he suddenly become the promoter of a limit, of a ceiling for corporate contributions? Will, all of a sudden, a corporation that would like to contribute $150,000 to the election fund of the Liberal Party of Canada, give $10,000 to its president, $10,000 to its vice-president, $10,000 to its secretary, and so on until the amount of $150,000 is reached? At least this is the possibility to which the government House leader alluded.

I guess that the government House leader was suddenly hit by the invaluable virtues of public financing, since he spoke so eloquently about it in this House.

My time is running out, but I will have the opportunity to address this issue again at the later stages of the bill, and I will examine more closely its various provisions and explain why these provisions seem satisfactory in some cases, but clearly unsatisfactory in others. In the meantime, we will have the opportunity to move a number of amendments.

● (1620)

[*English*]

The Deputy Speaker: Is the House ready for the question?

Some hon. members: Question.

The Deputy Speaker: The question is on the amendment to the amendment. Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the amendment to the amendment?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

The Deputy Speaker: All those in favour of the amendment to the amendment will please say yea.

Some hon. members: Yea.

The Deputy Speaker: All those opposed will please say nay.

Some hon. members: Nay.

The Deputy Speaker: In my opinion the nays have it.

And more than five members having risen:

The Deputy Speaker: Call in the members.

And the bells having rung:

The Deputy Speaker: The vote on the amendment to the amendment is deferred until Monday at the end of government orders.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Jacques Saada: I rise on a point of order, Mr. Speaker. I think that if you were to seek it, you would find unanimous consent to defer the taking of the deferred division until next Tuesday, at the end of government orders.

The Deputy Speaker: Is there unanimous consent of the House?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

* * *

[*English*]

CRIMINAL CODE

The House resumed from February 3 consideration of the motion that Bill C-20, an act to amend the Criminal Code (protection of children and other vulnerable persons) and the Canada Evidence Act, be read the second time and referred to a committee, and of the amendment.

Mr. Myron Thompson (Wild Rose, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, normally when I stand to speak on a particular bill I start by saying that it gives me pleasure to speak to it. However, it really does not give me a lot of pleasure to speak to this bill.

I cannot believe the number of months and years that hundreds of thousands of Canadians across this country have been begging and pleading with the government to do something about those who perpetrate crimes through child pornography. They want the government to do something about the sentencing that is going on in terms of house arrest, early release and conditional sentencing for pedophiles all across the country. Every day there is another case.

Why is the government so reluctant to say it will bring it to the table, bring it to the floor, and sit together as people who believe in protecting the children of this land? Why can it not fix it to ensure people cannot harm our children any more? Why must we stand and continually speak on this particular issue?

Why do we not have a justice minister and legislation that says there is no defence for child pornography, that artistic merit is out, and that there is no public good in child pornography? In fact, child pornography is ugly and evil. If it is not evil, then evil does not exist. Why are we continually debating whether we should do something about this now?

Perhaps we should present it to a committee to fix it. That means weeks and weeks, which usually turns into months and months, and then into years and years. The next thing we know it is thrown out because an election has been called. Then it has to be reintroduced and there we go again, a few more years of waiting to do the most elemental duty that we have as members of Parliament, which is to protect Canadians from harm and danger, and, most specifically, to protect the children of this country.

I have turned on the television and watched *Focus on the Family*, *100 Huntley Street*, and other programs that are calling on the government to do something about this horrible problem. The government is making no effort except through Bill C-20, which means it will provide a loophole once again for people who want to abuse the Internet and our children by throwing child pornography around wherever they please. Instead, it is creating what we call a haven for lawyers.

You can bet your last dime, Mr. Speaker, that for every charge of pornography that is brought against pedophiles they will claim that there is some public good in it and will tie up the court system day after day. More and more of them will tie up our court systems and the lawyers will get rich. It will be a joyful day for lawyers, but it will not be joyful for the victims, their parents or grandparents. The joyful day will be when the people on all sides of the House forget about politics, stand united, and say that today is the day we are going to rise to our feet and defeat this ugly, messy, and evil stuff that is absolutely destroying our nation on an immoral basis.

I see nothing wrong with doing that. What a pleasure it would be to work with the Liberals, the Bloc, the Conservatives and the NDP to say we want to protect the children of our country and actually do it.

What a shame when we hear the budget that was just introduced. The finance minister never mentioned the topic once. We have begged and the police have begged. All across the country police officers are asking to have their handcuffs removed to allow them to go out there and do something about this problem. They can do it, but they are handcuffed with court decisions that always protect the perpetrator and never look after the victims. They are asking for a chance to do it.

All the finance minister had to do was make one statement saying there would be whatever amount of money, $100 million or $200 million, to put a national strategy in place to fight child pornography. I would have stood on this side of the House and cheered that. However, there was no mention made, not even one cent was offered in that direction.

● (1625)

I have asked questions in the House day after day of the Solicitor General and of the justice minister. They say things are on their way; things are beginning to happen. Then I called all the front line officers and I spoke to some just today and I asked them how things were, were there any advancements in helping with the cause? They replied, "Absolutely none. Nothing is happening".

Am I supposed to believe the answers I get in question period from these ministers or the front line officers? As for me, I believe the front line officers. I no longer believe anything the ministers tell me. The Solicitor General said the government will protect children and it will look after their welfare. It should start doing it and start showing it.

The front line officers who are in charge of these crimes do not know a thing about it. They have not even heard about it.

I found out that Canada was an observer to an international program which digitally catalogued all seized pornographic images of children. This program was pioneered in Sweden and has enabled investigators to determine the origin of seized images and thereby assist in identifying the children being abused.

The technology is out there. Canada can afford it because it is not that expensive. Yet the government is sitting back and doing nothing.

I want to remind everybody in the House of these images. These are real children; they really exist. They belong to some parent or grandparent. They are real kids, from six month old babies up to eighteen years of age, who are being abused daily and treated horribly. We are not taking the initiative to fix it. We in the House could do it. Contrary to what the government believes about Supreme Court decisions, Canadians still believe that this is the highest court of the land, not the Supreme Court, and that we can fix it.

Members on that side of the House are afraid that if the legislation goes forward it would create a charter challenge. If it will protect our kids, then so be it. I cannot believe that the authors of the charter thought for a moment that they were creating a document that would protect people who hurt children rather than protect children. I cannot believe that they intended that.

Therefore let us ensure that the courts understand. Let us ensure the judges understand that we are developing an absolute truly zero tolerance to these kinds of perpetrators and we collectively will do it and do it quickly before there are any more victims.

If we must use the notwithstanding clause to keep the charter from interfering, then we must be determined to do that without hesitation. There would be no better reason in the world to use that clause than to protect the children that are being hurt daily.

There was a case of a trusted teacher who liked to fondle little girls. He was charged and convicted. He had the use of the Internet with thousands of items of pornography. It was a serious crime yet he received a slap on the wrist.

In the last few weeks there were three cases. There was a dentist with 50,000 images on his own computer, using it, promoting it, and making a profit off of it with real live children in these real live images. These perpetrators are not coming from the back alleys or slums. These are people who are living right beside us every day who need to be off the streets, and need to be taken out of society and around children.

However we cannot do it. Police officers could do it but we handcuff them. We do not let police officers do their job. Why do we tie police officers up? They should be given a chance. They are the experts. They can do it, but we in this place must make it possible for them to do so. We must send that message to the courts loud and clear, and to every judge in this country, that the next time a person is convicted of hurting a child that judge will treat that as seriously as any bank robber who would probably get 10 years instead of house arrest or community service.

● (1630)

Will we do that? I am sure that I will not get to speak on this bill again so I am begging and pleading with members of the Liberal Party to talk to the people in charge who could do that. That section should be pulled out of Bill C-20 and we should make certain that our children are safe.

That is the least we can do for my grandchildren, other people's grandchildren, and everybody in the country. That is the most elemental aspect of our duty. What are we waiting for? What kind of cowards are we that we do not take advantage of our position to say that one thing we can do it, and do it quickly, is solve the problem out there that so many children are facing. Let us do it.

The Deputy Speaker: Before resuming debate, it is my duty pursuant to Standing Order 38 to inform the House that the questions to be raised tonight at the time of adjournment are as follows: the hon. member for Lanark—Carleton, Official Languages; the hon. member for Yorkton—Melville, Firearms Registry.

Ms. Wendy Lill (Dartmouth, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to speak to Bill C-20. I support a vast majority of the bill. I have one problem with it which I will address later on in my remarks.

I support the sections in Bill C-20 dealing with sexual exploitation. I feel it is important to have mechanisms that protect children from sexual exploitation by those in positions of trust, be they parents, teachers, coaches or any other adults.

I support the creation of voyeurism offences because with various technological advances it has become even easier to invade people's privacy. This section would seek to update the Criminal Code to ensure that modern day peeping Toms could be prosecuted for the full range of crimes they commit.

Until recently voyeurism type offences would be prosecuted under trespass sections of the Criminal Code as they would usually involve trespassing on someone's property in order to invade their privacy. With this legislation, an improvement is made which states that photographing someone surreptitiously or using a mini camera to spy on them would be prosecuted under a section of the Criminal Code. Other offences would include prosecution under the section of distributing those materials, most commonly by e-mail or over the Internet.

I support the section that facilitates the sensitive treatment of children as witnesses as it seeks to make it easier and less traumatic for children to testify in criminal trials. This is a critical element of the bill and I support it. We have to do everything we can to make children feel comfortable when testifying about acts that have been committed against them.

I support also the increase in sentences for offences against children. We need to protect children from the growing range of exploitation. That includes the more sophisticated methods of exploiting children now through technological advances.

I have one concern with the government totally dropping the defence of artistic merit against potential charges of child pornography. Let me elaborate on what I see as problems with using the Criminal Code in this way. Let me also try to address some of the more extreme accusations that some make surrounding this difficult but important issue.

I strongly believe it is the role of Parliament and the Criminal Code to protect children from all forms of sexual exploitation. I have two sons and any form of sexual assault on them would be an unbelievably horrific thing to even contemplate. However, I am a writer of plays as well as a legislator. I think the government is making a mistake by caving in to the politics of fear that some have created coming out of the recent Sharpe decision at the Supreme Court.

Do not get me wrong. I think that anyone who creates sado-masochistic pornography depicting children as sexual objects is sick. I think people who distribute such trash are criminals. The courts agree, which is why Sharpe was convicted on charges of distributing child pornography.

The Supreme Court has sent us a message and I am worried that because of the high levels of emotion that surround this issue we are not hearing its message. The court said that artistic merit was a defence against a charge of possession of child pornography that is valid, but which could be interpreted as too broad and therefore anyone could say they are an artist. The court did not say that Sharpe was an artist. It said that Parliament drafted a sloppy law. Sharpe got off on the possession charge because of poor drafting by this House.

My worry is that the elimination of the artistic defence is simply another form of sloppy drafting. This one is dangerously sloppy because it could lead to establishing a principle in our Criminal Code that criminalizes the imagination. I will give a personal example.

● (1635)

Many years ago I wrote the play *All Fall Down* which among other things deals with allegations of sexual assault at a daycare. I will not go into the full plot; for that, members will have to buy a ticket. I worry that if we create a section of the Criminal Code which says that writing anything similar may result in charges of creating child pornography we are saying to creators, do not create.

We must not use the Criminal Code to censor art. Artists play an important role. That role is to hold a mirror up to society. If we do not like what we see, that is certainly another issue but we cannot say to artists that they cannot even attempt to address the vast and troubling areas of abuse of power and sexual exploitation of children. These are critical areas to look at. We have to go to the very heart of darkness of what we are seeing in our society. We have to look at that and we have to challenge ourselves. I have always thought that was the role of artists.

We should not use our Criminal Code to censor art and artists. I do not think we can take away the only defence they have for the very important role that they play. The government has put forward a substitute defence, and that is of the public good. I do not see this as giving legitimate artists who are telling important stories confidence that they will not be tracked down by overly moralistic police or crown prosecutors.

Remember that Sharpe was not the first person charged with child pornography offences under the previous law. It was just that he was the one who defeated the law because of poor drafting. Eli Langer, a respected Toronto painter, was charged in 1993 for giving a showing of his paintings which included depictions of nude children. He was acquitted after a long and expensive trial. We have seen gay and lesbian artists and bookstores charged by police and harassed by customs officers for material which does not have anything to do with children.

I have heard from arts groups that works of art such as *Lolita* by Nabokov, if he were writing it today, would not pass our laws of child pornography. We would have to look at *Romeo and Juliet* and many other works of art. Works of art will not be created in the future if we go in this direction of censoring people's imaginations.

I worry that the police chief of Toronto has been publicly criticizing the government and has been using child pornography as his reason to ask for more federal money for law enforcement. It does not bode well for our freedom of artists if police believe that their funding will increase if they lay more child pornography charges.

I would like to see a very careful examination of this issue at committee. We need to come up with a law that will protect children and which will also protect the creative spirit of artists to pursue their craft without fear and to play the very important role in society of holding up that mirror and having us look long and hard at ourselves.

I hope the committee will actively look for artists as witnesses. I will certainly be putting forward names of people and urging them to tell their stories to members of Parliament. I hope the committee will travel across the country to hear artists. As members of Parliament we need to understand the real fears which I have heard from this community. We need to understand all of the fears that are around these extremely emotional issues.

If members do their work here and in committee, I hope that they will redraft the section and that new ways will be found to create a section of the Criminal Code that protects children from real threats of exploitation by adults and which also protects artists from censorship by the police and the state. We need to do a better job of drafting this law than we did in 1992. I hope we are up to the challenge. I will do my part to make take place.

● (1640)

Mr. James Lunney (Nanaimo—Alberni, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, as my colleague from Wild Rose said, it is sometimes a pleasure to enter the debate in the House, but this bill is certainly not a pleasant thing to address because of the subject it deals with. In short, Bill C-20 is about child protection but it does not provide what it purports to do. My party wants to address why we feel that way and why we feel it is an illusion.

Ever since the Supreme Court decision in the case of John Robin Sharpe, Canadians have been waiting for the government to take the initiative and provide some genuine protection for Canadian children. Unfortunately, Bill C-20 fails in the effort and therefore it fails Canada as a whole.

I remember when the John Robin Sharpe decision came down in British Columbia because there was a huge public outcry in our communities. Members have received many letters and have presented many petitions in the House. I have tabled two petitions with over 1,000 signatures. Petitions have been submitted by all members of the House and in both official languages.

Most Canadians do not realize the extent of this plague of child pornography that is among us. I want to share some of the thoughts that have come in the deluge of mail I have received in my office.

Mrs. Hilda Higgs of Lantzville, B.C. wrote that she was appalled that someone could see anything artistic when it comes to child pornography.

Gerald Hall of Lantzville, B.C. quoted Job 9:24:

> When a land falls into the hands of the wicked, he blindfolds its judges. If it is not he, then who is it?

He wrote a second time and said that the minds of our children are too precious to allow misguided individuals like Mr. Sharpe to overturn perfectly common sense laws that are in place to protect society.

Marilyn Burrows of Port Alberni. B.C. wrote expressing concern that the John Robin Sharpe decision would set a dangerous precedent for our children.

Isabel Zenuk of Qualicum Beach wrote that children are our greatest natural resource and that we must work to close the loopholes in our child protection laws.

Dr. Maureen Keane from Qualicum Beach wrote and asked that the age of consent be raised and that the artistic merit defence be removed.

Dorothy Thomson from Parksville, B.C. sent a white ribbon and said that child pornography is a heinous crime against our children and our grandchildren and that it must be stopped.

Helen Metz of Parksville, B.C. wrote that artistic merit was a subjective quality, so anything could be judged to have artistic merit. She sent a white ribbon and asked us to close the loopholes in the legislation.

Joan Groot of Parksville, B.C. wrote that it was unbelievable to think that child pornography could have any artistic merit, and that this could not be the Canadian way.

In spite of the member who spoke earlier, I thought I heard her making some allusions that we had to consider art in this. I hope I misunderstood her, aside from the fact that I was a little distracted at the time with other matters.

Denzil and Rose Merriman of Nanaimo, B.C. wrote that children are a precious inheritance and should be cared for and looked after, and that the idea of child pornography had artistic merit was utter nonsense. I wholeheartedly agree.

Carol Rae of Errington, B.C. called the office to say that we must do something to prevent another Sharpe decision. She was worried that the new legislation would not stop child pornography. I share her concern, as do many members on this side of the House.

The government has brought in the public good defence as a legal defence instead of artistic merit. Most Canadians would have a hard time understanding that any depiction of an adult abusing a child sexually could have any artistic merit.

It is time for our artists to have a reality check. It is time for the House to deliver such a reality check with very clear legislation that removes such defences and makes child pornography, as the member for Wild Rose said, eliminated in our society. We can do it. We have the ability to do it. We need to do it to protect our children.

Most Canadians are not aware of how pervasive this problem is. I do not think all members in the House have any idea.

Some of us were here when members of the Toronto police came to the Hill. They apologized for having to subject us to the protrayal of such graphic images. Their officers, after dealing with this stuff and looking at it, sometimes have to go on leave because of the sickness they feel after seeing those images.

● (1645)

Some members here who viewed those images had to leave the room. Some could not bear to look at the images. I am still haunted by some of the images we saw brought forward by the Toronto police, by what is out there on the Internet, what people are feeding on and what is being spread in our society, hundreds of images through computers and through other means, and yet the courts want to say that there is artistic merit in some of this. We need to get this stuff out of our society. It is poisoning the minds of our citizens and it is leading to abuse of our children. It needs to be stopped.

One of the most glaring failures of the legislation is the proposal that the legal defence for child pornography has been sufficiently narrowed to prevent harm to children through using the so-called "public good" defence.

In the Supreme Court case involving John Robin Sharpe, the chief justice remarked in paragraph 70:

> "Public good" has been interpreted as "necessary or advantageous to religion or morality, to the administration of justice, the pursuit of science, literature, or art, or other objects of general interest."

The glaring problem is that asking whether or not a piece of child pornography has artistic merit is the same as asking whether a piece of child pornography is necessary or advantageous to the pursuit of art. The answer is very likely to be the same in the courts.

The concerns of my constituents are very likely to be borne out, that justices can look at the images that John Robin Sharpe had as artistic merit, they are likely to be approved under this public good defence.

The government wants us to believe the same legal procedure for defence will result in a different verdict and that children will be protected. I call that smoke and mirrors. It is not good enough. We need to close the loopholes, not change the names they go by.

If the Supreme Court found that pornography had artistic merit, it certainly could find that child pornography was necessary and advantageous to the pursuit of art. The defence is the same, why would the result be different? There should be no defence for child pornography.

The age of consent is another glaring disappointment in the proposed legislation. It fails to raise the age of sexual consent from 14 to 16. That is for sex between adults and children. It is hard to fathom why the government refuses to make this much needed amendment to the criminal code. The police chiefs are asking for it. We have young girls at 14 years of age who think they know everything about the world. We were young once and we thought we knew a lot, but at that age they are children. They have not had enough life experience to resist the luring and the abuse that adults expose them to. The fact is that 14 year olds are being abused. We need to raise the age of sexual consent.

Whereas Canada was once recognized as a global leader in combating the sexual exploitation of children, the international group, ECPAT, the End Child Prostitution in Asian Tourism and which is now called End Child Prostitution, Pornography and Trafficking, released a report in November 2000 stating that Canada's regressive age of consent laws, flawed legislation and an overall lack of planning by the federal government are turning Canada into a venue for sexual exploitation of children.

The report, titled "Looking Back, Thinking Forward", also criticized Canada for increasingly becoming a hot spot for sexual tourism. Predators are coming from all over the world to take advantage of our lax age of consent laws, and Canadian children are paying the price.

Maximum sentencing is another failure. The government proposes increases in maximum sentencing but, frankly, maximum sentences are hardly ever used. We should be raising the minimum sentences so that we send the message to our criminals out there that they will pay a price if they abuse our children.

Police and prosecutors still do not have the tools to deal with child pornography cases effectively or efficiently. Children must be protected from abuse at the hands of all adult predators, regardless of whether that relationship is a so-called trust relationship or not. The Liberals' failure to prohibit all adult-child sex leaves children at an unacceptable risk.

The artistic merit defence needs to be eliminated, not changed into a public good defence. That is a charade. Higher maximum sentences will not be effective. We need higher minimum sentences. The age of sexual consent for adult-child sex must be raised to protect our children.

I hope that members will consider this bill and make the amendments necessary to protect our children. It is time we took action in the House for the good of our citizens, for the good of our children and for the good of our society.

● (1650)

Mr. Gary Lunn (Saanich—Gulf Islands, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, I too am pleased to stand and represent all the constituents of Saanich—Gulf Islands, although on a very troublesome topic. It is not a topic that is about political parties or partisan politics. This is a topic about the most vulnerable in our society, our children. It is our duty and our obligation as parliamentarians to ensure that children are protected, no matter from which walk of life we come.

This all goes back to the Robin Sharpe case. I remember being in Vancouver, speaking at rallies and listening to parents. They had genuine concerns. To see this man go through the courts, the Supreme Court, the Court of Appeal, and have the decision upheld that it was legal for him to be in possession of child pornography, was absolutely sick. Our laws said that it was illegal to duplicate it but that it was okay to have it for one's own personal use.

That creates a demand in the market to produce this absolutely sick material. I would argue that clause 1, that the greater interest of public good, that the charter would override the argument that was made under the charter that it was freedom of expression and that he was entitled to have this.

I wish the government had acted sooner, especially when the case was first before the courts, but it actually has dealt with the defence of artistic merit. Unfortunately, it has been replaced with the single defence of the public good.

From a legal perspective we need to ask ourselves what that means. This is not politics. It is strictly factual. I put this out as information and hopefully we can correct this very serious flaw in the legislation. The Supreme Court of Canada has already dealt with this. We do not have to ask it for a ruling on the defence of public good. The Supreme Court ruled that there was no substantial difference between the defence and the previous defence. The communities standards test that was rendered ineffective by the Supreme Court in the 1992 Butler case. The communities standards test, just like the public good defence, was concerned primarily with the risk of harm to individuals in society. There is no positive benefit in recycling laws that have already been discredited by our courts. The Supreme Court of Canada has already ruled on this matter.

It is our duty and our obligation to ensure that there are no loopholes. I would argue, even if we infringe on the rights of the individual protected under the charter, that the infringement is so minimal compared to the greater good of society and that it should be saved by clause 1.

I would plead with all members of the House to ensure that our children are protected. We have heard other members talk about how sick this material is. I am sure all members know that. I do not think there is a member in the House from any political party who is not as horrified as I am. They are as concerned about the children of this nation as I am.

I would ask all members to go back to their respective colleagues and have a good look at the bill, go back to the Department of Justice and tell them that they have concerns about this and that loopholes need to be closed. We cannot leave the door cracked open. If the government wants to crack it open on an adult, although I do not know if that would be okay, but absolutely not on our children. We must slam the door shut.

As I was discussing this morning in another piece of legislation, when legislation is ambiguous and a little uncertain, it is our job to make it crystal clear. You and I did that this morning, Mr. Speaker, in another committee.

● (1655)

We should be doing that here. I feel very strongly about that. I have two young children, ages seven and nine. I am sure many members do as well. I want our children to have our full protection. We do not want to allow this sick, degrading behaviour by anyone for any reason. We absolutely must send a message that it will not be tolerated at all.

I think we should be going further. We should not be allowing conditional sentences for any child predator. Most animals are probably more humane than human predators. This has to be the most sick, warped, demented behaviour. We as parliamentarians can do something about that. We can ensure that a situation like Robin Sharpe does not happen. We can ensure that child predators from other countries know that Canada is closed for business, that we do not want them here, and that if they ever do come here and they act in this manner they will be dealt with in the most severe way and with the harshest penalties we can impose in our courts. It is simply not okay.

I would ask the members of all parties to have a hard look at the legislation while we still have an opportunity to amend it.

Hon. Don Boudria: We have to send it to committee to amend it.

Mr. Gary Lunn: In response to the hon. government House leader, I hope it does go to committee, which is what I am talking about, but our opportunity for debate is now.

I say to all members opposite, not in a partisan way, that when we do get the bill to committee that we should have a serious look at it, examine previous court decisions and then make sure there is absolutely zero opportunity for a defence of artistic merit or public good. We must ensure those loopholes are closed for the greater good of society and, most important, for the good of all our children.

● (1700)

The Deputy Speaker: Is the House ready for the question?

Some hon. members: Question.

The Deputy Speaker: The question is on the amendment. Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the amendment?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

The Deputy Speaker: All those in favour of the amendment will please say yea.

Some hon. members: Yea.

The Deputy Speaker: All those opposed will please say nay.

Some hon. members: Nay.

The Deputy Speaker: In my opinion the nays have it.

And more than five members having risen:

The Deputy Speaker: Call in the members.

And the bells having rung:

The Deputy Speaker: Accordingly, the vote is deferred until Monday at the end of the government orders.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Jacques Saada: Mr. Speaker, I think that if you were to seek it, you would find consent to defer the taking of the deferred division until Tuesday at the end of government orders.

The Deputy Speaker: The Deputy Speaker: Is it agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

[*English*]

Hon. Don Boudria: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. There were consultations earlier today between the various parties and I think you would find consent to call it 5.30 p.m. and move on to private members' business.

The Deputy Speaker: Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Deputy Speaker: It being 5.30 p.m. the House will now proceed to the consideration of private members' business as listed on today's Order Paper.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

[*English*]

VIMY RIDGE DAY ACT

The House proceeded to the consideration of Bill C-227, an act respecting a national day of remembrance of the Battle of Vimy Ridge, as reported (without amendment) from the committee.

Mr. Brent St. Denis (Algoma—Manitoulin, Lib.) moved that the bill be concurred in.

(Motion agreed to)

The Deputy Speaker: When shall the bill be read the third time? By leave, now?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Mr. Brent St. Denis moved that the bill be read the third time and passed.

He said: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague, the member for Mississauga South, for seconding my motion. It is most appreciated. I just learned a few minutes ago that he has had the privilege of visiting the Vimy Ridge Memorial at Vimy in France. I hope in the near future to have that same privilege.

I am indeed honoured to be the sponsor of Bill C-227, a bill which would establish a day in honour of the Battle of Vimy Ridge and in honour of all the Canadians who fought and won this vital and critical victory for the allies in World War I.

If I may quote from an excellent document produced by the Edmonton Public School Board, written by Douglas Davis, it states:

> The Canadian success at Vimy Ridge was the first allied victory on the Western Front since the fall of 1914. Without a doubt, by the spring of 1917, the Canadians were the best equipped, best trained and best led allied troops on the Western Front.

I would point out to members that the bill would create a day of remembrance on April 9 of each year and would provide that on that day the Peace Tower flag be flown at half-mast.

I would also like to underline that it would not create a holiday. This is simply another opportunity that we would provide to Canadians, particularly students, with the tremendous support no doubt of Legions across the country that do a great a job on our behalf to ensure the memory of war remains strong, to reflect on our very important military history and to ensure that we never make the tragic mistake of unnecessary war.

I have a few people to thank and I would like to do that right now.

Robert Manuel, a constituent of mine, came to me in 1999 with this idea of a millennium project, that April 9 be declared Vimy Ridge Day. His initiative and great efforts over the last couple of years have provided tremendous support for this initiative.

I also want to thank the member for South Surrey—White Rock—Langley, who knows very well how much she has helped me with this bill.

I also want to thank the ministers of the Crown, who have indicated their strong support for this bill, the Royal Canadian Legion Dominion Command to Pierre Berton to the veterans associations and so many other people and organizations. They all have come forward and have said that this is the right thing to do.

I will not use my entire 20 minutes. I hope, with everybody's co-operation, that we can dispense with this issue today. In fact I believe, based on the response at committee and second reading, that there is a broad consensus to move forward.

I want to continue by asking this question. Why do we want to remember war in any of its forms, not just Vimy Ridge? It certainly is not to glorify war. Rather it is to remember those who sacrificed their lives, their bodies and their minds for freedom. Also we never want to forget the horror, tragedy and the heroism of war, and that forever we think carefully about entering the precincts of war again.

Why pick Vimy Ridge? After all Canadians have been involved in many great battles and in many terrible wars. In the first world war, names like the Somme, Ypres and Passchendaele hold strong memories for many. However Vimy Ridge stands out because it was the first time Canadians from all parts of the country fought together, under a Canadian commander. In fact every region of the country was represented among the 100,000 soldiers who were assembled for the very difficult task of taking Vimy Ridge. I look forward to the comments of my colleague from the riding of Kootenay—Columbia whose grandfather was there.

● (1705)

The fact that we lost 4,000 soldiers, including 10,000 casualties, was a huge number. When we consider that 150,000 French soldiers had been lost in previous efforts to take that ridge, this pales in comparison to the efforts and losses of previous attempts to take Vimy Ridge. It underscores the brilliance with which the Canadians undertook to seize that ridge from the Germans.

I could give my opinion on different things, but I think it is best if I tell the House in the words of people who were at Vimy Ridge, like David Debassige, the father of Gus Debassige, who was an aboriginal soldier from Manitoulin Island. There were people like Duncan McPhee, who came from the small town of Webbwood in my riding. Like all the others, he was a very young man. His town has honoured his memory with a piece in their local history book.

A female friend of his later wrote a beautiful poem in his memory. I will excerpt only a couple of verses at this point. I would point out that Duncan McPhee was actually born in Quebec and moved to northern Ontario with his family in pursuit of a career in the logging industry. She said:

> He went on to the battle fields,
> He fought the deadly foe,
> Our brave Canadian soldier
> Was not afraid to go.
> He left his home and country
> His friends and all those nigh
> He gave his life for freedom
> He was not afraid to die.

This is another verse from this beautiful poem:

> A place is vacant in our home
> Which never can be filled
> He died out in the trenches
> 'Twas there Our Saviour willed.
> He left his home and country
> To battle for the right,
> Our brave Canadian soldier
> Was not afraid to fight.

His female friend had to stay home and learn of the tragedy of his loss through the news or by telegram.

There are other stories. I think it would be appropriate at this time to read a piece from an essay done by a high school student, Joel Ralph from Sudbury, who in 1999 was a grade 11 student at Lockerby Composite School As a young person, he tried to imagine what it was like to be there. I commend the entire essay to the House and hope Joel will forgive me if I can only read a short piece of it right now. In part of his essay, as he helps us to try to imagine what it was like, he says:

> The dawn of that cold and snowy April 9th would be greeted by one of the greatest explosions in history. The men in the trenches waiting for the attack to begin heard the sound of a single artillery gunfire and then 982 more heavy artillery pieces and 150 machine guns opened fire in unison. The sound was deafening and can only be described by those who were there.
>
> The unsuspecting Germans, who did not expect an attack for at least a week, were caught completely off guard as the shells fell among them. The Canadians moved quickly forward behind the barrage and were at the summit of Vimy Ridge by noon.
>
> The victory was one of the only decisive victories in the entire war and was to become the model of the final attacks of 1918. The Canadians suffered accordingly: some 4,000 dead of 10,000 casualties. Nevertheless, the attack proved the Canadians to be the best army in the world and they accordingly would form the iron tip of the spearhead that would end the war in 1918.
>
> The day the Canadians attacked Vimy Ridge was the day Canada was born. For those troops who had taken part in the attack, some who had only been in Canada less than a month before signing up to fight, they were all Canadians. The name "Canada" on their shoulders would be the knot that held them together. The troops came from Nova Scotia to Montreal, Ottawa to Winnipeg, Regina to Vancouver, even the Northwest, and everywhere else in between.

● (1710)

> These were Canadians who bonded together and found a comradeship that could only be found in the deepest trench or the biggest crater. They would fight together and go home to Canada together, those who survived.
>
> That morning when they set out to seize Vimy Ridge, they were Commonwealth soldiers, but when they reached the summit they were Canadians.

I thank Joel Ralph for that.

I want to allow others to have time to make their comments. I am humbled by this opportunity to have a chance to pursue a citizen's initiative. I really believe that it will be some years before I truly have a chance to appreciate the import of what might seem a token acknowledgement of a great battle. Indeed, as a member of Parliament, Mr. Speaker, I am sure you notice, as I do, that the spirit of remembrance is getting stronger and stronger in this country.

The essay by this young person and the letters which I receive from classes of kids indicate to me that the work done by our veterans and legions deserves this offering that we recognize one important battle, a battle that Canadians first fought together, a battle that we can use as a symbol for all battles.

I very much appreciate the expressions of support from the members in this place. I look forward to hearing what other members have to say throughout this hour.

● (1715)

Mr. Jim Abbott (Kootenay—Columbia, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, many Canadians are beginning to spend time learning about their family history, which is good, but what about our country's history, the sacrifices made by the men and women of the country to ensure we can enjoy a life of freedom and peace?

I have always believed it is significant to understand our history and appreciate those who fought for our country. It became even more meaningful to me during a recent visit last year to Vimy Ridge in France. Standing at this historic site I was overcome with a sense of pride of being Canadian and about the bravery of the soldiers who fought for our freedom. There is a great deal to be learned from Canada's history. When we take the time to sit down with relatives and friends, and ask questions about important events or moments in our past we gain a sense of who we are.

Canadian soldiers fought under British army command during most of the first world war. We had four divisions, but until Vimy the four divisions had never been united. Having achieved a well earned reputation for bravery and intelligence, the four Canadian divisions were brought together to do something that no other army could do, and that was to take Vimy Ridge. Other allied forces had tried for years.

The scarred countryside today is still evidence of the tonnes and tonnes of explosives that were detonated. The opposing trenches were close enough to throw a football back and forth. There are accounts that the soldiers did this on occasion to relieve the boredom, but there are also accounts that a live grenade was sometimes taped to the ball.

The tunnels, 30 feet under the surface, all dug by hand, testified to the gnawing fear that must have been the soldiers' constant companion. The tunnels were narrow so troops could only advance; there was no retreat. The only method of communicating with the front line was by runners who carried written messages. A runner's career averaged just 36 hours from the time he started running to the time he was dead or seriously wounded. Alcohol supplied by the army to dull the pain and twisting fear was an essential part of many soldiers' survival.

None of the world's armies had taken Vimy Ridge. From the ridge the view extends about 10 miles. It became a wall of defence. The war bogged down in the mud, slime, ooze and human pestilence. Canada's generals developed a plan. The soldiers and officers practised for weeks on end with each one having a specific task. Over 30,000 men were scheduled to go over the top, and they did. Canada's army achieved 70% of its objectives in the first 24 hours of the attack. They did in two days what no other army could in two years, something for which we should be justifiably proud.

What about those who did not come back and what about their families? I learned something about my own family on the Vimy visit. I stood where my grandfather had been. He fought in the tunnels and the trenches. He was a hardworking, God-fearing family man, but Grandpa came back from the war a broken man. He fought with the demons of whizzing bullets, alcohol, unspeakable disease, and exploding bombs after the war. He died three years later. This is my family heritage as much as it is our country's heritage.

The memorial at Vimy Ridge stands on top of a hill as Canadian soil. France was so grateful it gave Canada the land as a memorial to the bravery and sacrifice of our Canadian soldiers.

Vimy Ridge is not the only place where we distinguished ourselves. All over the world Canadians are respected for bravery, intelligence and service. As official opposition heritage critic I support memorials and acts of remembrance like this. Canada has a distinguished history in the world.

● (1720)

It struck home last Thursday night as I was watching TVO *Studio 2* and it featured four very articulate grade 7 and grade 8 kids. They were discussing whether we should or should not go to Iraq and what should our position be with respect to supporting or not supporting unilateral action of the UN. They had taken the time to inform themselves. They had the privilege of informing themselves because of the sacrifices that have been made by the many brave people who have gone to war for us.

Anybody could have watched TVO that night because we live in a democracy with freedoms. We live in a country where we can say what we will say, do what we will do, and be our own person. We live in a country not only because of the sacrifices of the very brave soldiers, sailors and airmen who have gone to theatres of war, but also because of the sacrifices of their families when they did not come back. Or, as in the unfortunate case of my own family, when a soldier came back a broken person as a result of the war.

Canada is a great nation with a wonderful history. The idea of this day of remembrance of Vimy Ridge is one that I wholeheartedly support because it was turning point in our nation.

In doing a little bit of research on this I discovered that in 1914 Canada went to war without a voice of her own, with a regular army of 3,110 souls and 684 horses, a navy of just 300 men, and an air force consisting of two canvas planes still packed in crates. I am so tempted to make a political comment, but it would be so inappropriate right now. Only 12 regular officers had completed staff college courses.

It is easy to understand the opinion of a German general, writing a military appreciation for supreme command in Berlin, that the colonial Canadians could play no significant part in any European war. The militia, enthusiastic amateurs, given foppish uniforms and quadrilles, were described by Colonel W. Hamilton Merritt, of the Canadian Governor- General's Horse Guards, recently returned from the sharp realities of the South African war, as part of “the most expensive and ineffective military system of any civilized community in the world”.

In 1918, just four years later, incredibly, Canada stood at the spearhead of the thrust into the enemy held territory with her own full corps of 100,000 fighting men under Canadian generals with a combat reputation second to none, and in 1919, walked forward and put her own signature on the Treaty of Versailles.

In that era—it already seems as distant as the Crusades—the majority of Canadians were glad to fight for gallant Belgium and mother England. However, one of the greatest Canadians of all time, Sir Wilfred Laurier, said immediately:

> There is in Canada but one mind and one heart... today we realize that Great Britain is at war and that Canada is at war also.

This what Vimy Ridge is about. This is a defining moment of Canada.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron (Verchères—Les-Patriotes, BQ): Mr. Speaker, it is my pleasure to rise to speak on this bill.

I would like to point out that I am not the member of our party who should be speaking tonight. In fact, we expected this motion tomorrow, but due to rescheduling of parliamentary work, the motion is being debated tonight, and the person who would normally be speaking on this bill is not here.

However, I would like to speak so that the Bloc Quebecois' silence tonight is not interpreted as rejection of or lack of interest in this important issue by our party.

Like me, over the past few years you have seen motions introduced by our colleagues to establish one day of remembrance or another. If there is one such day that deserves to be debated and provisions for its establishment passed, it is a day to commemorate and pay tribute to the veterans who fought at Vimy Ridge.

First, the creation of a day of remembrance for these soldiers would only be fitting for the Parliament of a country whose appearance on the international stage coincided with this major battle, which was a turning point in the first world war.

I also believe that we can all agree here that through this recognition of the Battle of Vimy Ridge, we pay tribute to all the soldiers from Canada, Quebec and Newfoundland who took part in various conflicts to preserve the freedom and the relative security we enjoy today.

I was saying just a few moments ago that the Battle of Vimy Ridge was not only a turning point in the first world war, but, as was said at the beginning of this debate, that it also turned out to be, for the rest of the world, the day Canada was born. Until then, Canadian troops had fought under the flag of the British Empire. The Battle of Vimy Ridge was the first opportunity for Canadian troops to be seen as a separate force on the battlefield.

While Canada achieved official independence some years later, by virtue of the Statute of Westminister in 1931, the fact remains that the very important battle at Vimy Ridge accelerated the process that led to the Statute of Westminister.

We owe a debt of gratitude to those who fought on Vimy Ridge and to all those who made the ultimate sacrifice. And, as I said earlier, through these courageous and valliant fighters, we must pay tribute to all those who served their country to allow us to enjoy the freedom, democracy and relative security that characterizes today's modern society.

● (1725)

[*English*]

Ms. Wendy Lill (Dartmouth, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it is an honour to rise and support my colleague from Algoma—Manitoulin and his Bill C-227, an act to formally recognize Canada's important role in the World War I Battle of Vimy Ridge which raged in France from April 9 to 12, 1917.

I support the bill because I believe we should always do everything possible to remember and honour the efforts of our brave young men and women who fought and died in Canada's wars.

I come from a constituency with a very proud military tradition which predates the first world war. I am told that the cliffs of Dartmouth were used by General Wolfe to train his troops for an eventual assault on Quebec in the 18th century. As well, the Halifax harbour has been North America's staging ground for both commerce and war for the last 400 years. I know my constituents carry a deep respect for the accomplishments and sacrifices of our armed forces.

1917 is a very special year. It is a year that had a major impact on my city. During that year of the great war, while husbands, sons, brothers and sweethearts were away fighting in the muddy trenches of France, much of Dartmouth and north Halifax was destroyed by an explosion in the harbour of an ammunition ship bound for Europe.

Just imagine that, many of our fighting men and women in places such as the newly held Vimy Ridge survived terrible battles only to be told of the death of their loved ones in the largest explosion in history before the development of atomic weapons. Some of the damage from the Halifax explosion is still visible today. I am told that some of the ammunition still stored in the Bedford magazine dates back to that era as well.

The traditions which have been handed down from those times still live on in Dartmouth. Today the harbour is busy with the preparations for the imminent departure of the destroyer and command ship HMCS *Iroquois*. It is bound for the Persian Gulf as part of our contribution in the UN sanctioned battle against al-Qaeda and terrorism following the attacks of September 11.

That crew, like the soldiers who left Halifax harbour in 1916 to do battle on Vimy Ridge, sail off into unknown danger. I pray for their safe return and I know that everyone in this place offers their prayers as well.

The bill asks Canada to lower our flag to half-mast every April 9 in memory of the 3,598 young men who were killed and the 7,004 who were wounded on Vimy Ridge in that snowy April 86 years ago.

It is reasonable to ask why Vimy is so special, because Canadians have fought and died in many wars. Why is Vimy such a special day and battle to remember?

Many historians will argue that the Battle of Vimy Ridge gave Canada its right to act as an independent country both in war and subsequently in peace. They claim that on April 9, 1917 we became a really independent nation and that we paid the price in blood.

On April 9, 1917 after months of preparation, the Canadian Corps attacked the Germans on Vimy Ridge, an area which was considered to have great strategic importance as guns on that height threatened France's northern coalfields. The Canadians were sent to Vimy to force the Germans out and claim the area back for France. The battle ended four days later when the Canadians captured the ridge.

Claiming back Vimy Ridge was a great victory because it had been one of Germany's great positions and great strongholds in France. The Canadian Corps captured more land, guns and prisoners than the British during any of their earlier attempts. By the end of the fourth day, Canada had advanced 4.8 kilometres into enemy territory, taking 124 machine guns and capturing 4,000 German prisoners.

● (1730)

Unfortunately the attack took a heavy toll on Canadians. In all, 7,004 Canadians were wounded and 3,598 died at Vimy Ridge.

The final reason the victory was significant at Vimy Ridge was that the success of our soldiers encouraged our national pride. The battle of Vimy made Canadians proud of their young, independent nation. They were impressed that the men of the Canadian Corps represented many cultures from across Canada. Most of the men had enlisted as untrained volunteers. However by 1917 they were one of the world's most skilled and respected fighting battalions.

Canadians have reason to be proud of their hard won victory at Vimy Ridge. I am very glad to be standing here today and supporting my colleague across the House on this very important bill.

● (1735)

Mr. Loyola Hearn (St. John's West, PC): Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure to support the bill brought forward by my colleague opposite.

We could learn some lessons from some of the key statements written about the Battle of Vimy Ridge. It has been said that unless we learn from history, we are doomed to repeat it. Maybe there are certain things about history that we should be repeating.

On Easter Monday in 1917, 100,000 Canadians from all parts of Canada took part in one battle. The language they spoke or the colour of their skin did not make any difference. They were there, united in that major battle and took Vimy Ridge, something that no other country could do. It is known as the time when Canada emerged on the national stage. We were a key player. I am not sure whether we are a key player today. Maybe we should look at our involvement and ask ourselves what has happened.

One other thing mentioned about the battle was that each member carried 32 kilograms of equipment. Today, for 100,000 Canadians to carry 32 kilograms of equipment, it would probably amount to more equipment than we actually have.

What have we lost? What can we learn from history?

One of the things we should remember is that 100,000 Canadians went forward with the support of the whole country. That is perhaps something we have lost today. People do not realize how significant it is for Canada to be a major player. Our input in the Battle of Vimy Ridge showed what we could do. I am sure we could do the same today if called upon, provided the proper supports were there.

Vimy Ridge was defended for so long because of its location and its tremendous view. The Canadians used a tunnelling system. It is almost impossible to explain how it could be done under the circumstances at that time in history in the early 1900s but it was done. Just think of the time, effort and strategy that went into creating a network of tunnels that helped the Canadians infiltrate the land held by the Germans.

Canada did something that no other country could do. It was a tremendous time for Canada and for all Canadians. Undoubtedly it was a turning point in the war. This was a war which, by our involvement, we helped win thereby creating the freedoms that we all have today.

A tremendous monument is erected at Vimy Ridge which represents the deeds of those Canadians at that time. The monument has been visited by many Canadians to commemorate the involvement of their loved ones in the past. The monument is preserved for that very purpose. We can learn from this because we are neglecting to preserve our own monuments throughout Canada.

As we contribute to great monuments that mark specific battles or events, we should never fail to contribute to and promote the monuments such as our cenotaphs and legion halls throughout this country. They are our veterans, whether they were involved in the first world war or the second world war, who have moved off the world stage to a better land. We should not forget their involvement. As some members have said before, we must keep our cenotaphs and our legions going in their memory. We should learn from the past.

● (1740)

When we feel the sense of pride that we do in just reading 85 years later the involvement of people across this country, it should be enough to inspire us to support and promote Canada's place on the world stage. First, hopefully, in a peacekeeping effort, but if we must take part in war, as we did in 1917, let us never be hesitant to do so and with the support of the country.

It is a great bill that has been brought forward. It gives us the opportunity to recognize what has been done for us by those who went to war and it creates an awareness of the type of world in which we live, which at this time in our history might also be very pertinent. We are very pleased to support the bill put forward by my colleague opposite.

Mr. Ivan Grose (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Veterans Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as you know, I seldom rise in the House to speak. There is enough of little consequence that goes on here that members do not need me to add it. However, today I have something important to say. I am proud to join my colleagues in support of Bill C-227, an act respecting a national day of remembrance of the Battle of Vimy Ridge.

I will begin my remarks by thanking all of my colleagues who have spoken in favour of this legislation. I would like to pay a special tribute to my colleague, the hon. member for Algoma—Manitoulin, who has worked closely with his colleagues in bringing his private member's bill to this important stage in our parliamentary process.

I know the hon. member would prefer to pass the credit to his constituent, Mr. Robert Manuel, for inspiring this initiative, but this legislation would not have been possible without the hon. member's commitment and leadership. Both he and Mr. Manuel deserve our deepest appreciation on a job well done. I would also like to thank the members of the Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage who reviewed and endorsed this legislation.

Bill C-227 is part and parcel of a wider discussion about how we can better remember the contributions of our veterans when so many of our firsthand witnesses are no longer with us. How can we best honour the memory of those who served and sacrificed their lives for their country? How do we preserve and promote their legacy for future generations of Canadians?

April 9, 1917, marks the day upon which Canada became a nation. It was a turning point in our history. Up until then we were colonial, part of the British army. The Battle of Vimy Ridge was the first time that Canadian soldiers would fight as one formation, the Canadian Corps under Canadian command. One major battle, one seemingly impossible victory, and the world began to look at Canada differently. As many have said, Canada became a nation at Vimy Ridge.

The Battle of Vimy Ridge is one of Canada's best known war stories for the ingenuity shown by those who planned the attack and by the men who carried it out. It was indeed the first time that all four divisions of the Canadian Corps had fought together, but it would not be the last. At Vimy Ridge the price of victory would be high. In those three spring days of 1917 there would be more than 10,000 Canadian casualties. Of those, 3,598 would lie forever in French soil.

The accounts of bravery and courage are told in the four Victoria Crosses won in those few hours, and in the untold and unsung actions of the other Canadian soldiers who did what two other Allied nations could not do. They took Vimy Ridge.

There are some who have asked whether this legislation creates a precedent. In the past, it has not been Canadian practice to single out a particular Canadian battle or campaign in such a manner as proclaiming a national day of remembrance. Rather, it has been our custom to mark the major anniversary dates of significant Canadian contributions in the two world wars and in Korea through pilgrimages abroad and commemorative ceremonies at home.

Remembrance Day is a time when Canadians join hands to solemnly commemorate the service and sacrifices of all those who served Canada in times of war, conflict and peace.

We would not want to give the impression with the passage of this bill that somehow the sacrifices made on a particular day in history are more worthy than those made in any other campaign in any of the wars or conflicts that we have participated in.

Let me reiterate that Canadians value and honour the contributions, accomplishments and sacrifices of all of Canada's veterans.

There is little argument that there is something quite extraordinary about the actions at Vimy Ridge which led to equally extraordinary results for Canada as a nation.

Few events in our military history have played such an important role in the development of the Canadian nation as the Battle of Vimy Ridge. Before the war ended, Canadian courage and prowess had won recognition in the imperial war cabinet and a seat for Canada at the peace conference at the war's end.

Around Vimy Ridge lay dozens of Canadian cemeteries, some within metres and others only a few kilometres away. It was from one of those dozen cemeteries around the Vimy Ridge battlefield that an unknown Canadian soldier, known only unto God, was selected to return home and represent the tens of thousands of Canadians who have lost their lives in war. The Unknown Soldier lies in a place of honour in front of the National War Memorial here in our nation's capital.

Hon. members who follow the veterans affairs portfolio are aware that we hold annual ceremonies at the Vimy Ridge memorial in France to commemorate the Canadian victory. For those who have had the privilege of visiting the Canadian National Vimy Memorial the experience is emotional and compelling. One comes away more convinced than ever of the importance of keeping the memory of our fallen alive for future generations.

● (1745)

I have never had the opportunity to visit the memorial myself, but the beauty and importance of the memorial is brought home to me often when I visit the sergeant's mess of my local militia regiment, the Ontario Regiment. The Ontario, then named the 116th Battalion of the Canadian Expeditionary Force, fought with great honour at Vimy Ridge.

Hanging in a prominent place in the mess is a reproduction of a famous painting, the *Ghosts of Vimy Ridge*, which was painted in 1931. It portrays the spirits of servicemen of the Canadian Corps in ghostly form climbing Vimy Ridge towards the memorial that stands dramatically on the summit beneath silvery moonlight.

Members will remember seeing this same picture often as it is commemorated in mural form in the Railway Room of the Centre Block. It is an awe inspiring picture that never fails to remind me of the sacrifice of those young Canadians who never returned from that terrible field in France.

The Vimy Ridge memorial is not immune to the effects of time, nature and environmental pollution. That is why the Government of Canada has committed $30 million to the restoration of the Vimy Ridge memorial and 12 other Canadian first world war battlefield memorials in Europe. The repair work required to rehabilitate these memorial sites, now an average of 75 years old, is beyond the scope of routine maintenance.

The program of work is being carried out by Veterans Affairs Canada in collaboration with Public Works and Government Services Canada, the Commonwealth War Graves Commission and other specialists, consultants and military historians. The project work is expected to be completed in 2006.

By implementing this bill we would reinforce the commemoration initiatives that Veterans Affairs already provides to recognize and honour the significance of the Battle of Vimy Ridge.

For many years, Veterans Affairs has concentrated much of its commemorative efforts overseas, with pilgrimages of veterans returning to old battlegrounds, monuments and cemeteries so they could pay tribute to their comrades who fell and remain buried in foreign fields. Some hon. members have participated in these pilgrimages.

As important as our overseas commemorative work is, over the past seven or eight years we have begun to pay increased attention to commemoration and remembrance here at home. Pilgrimages will continue, but in a more focused manner and with a greater emphasis on youth and getting the message out through more in-Canada activities.

The passage of Bill C-227 would not be the end of the matter, but just the beginning. If we are going to proclaim the 9th day of April as a national day of remembrance for the Battle of Vimy Ridge, we must do more than just pass a bill in this place. It is incumbent upon all members to spread the word among their constituents about the importance of this day in our history and how they might remember the day in their local communities.

Our challenge, really our duty, is to keep alive the memory of our veterans and their contribution to building a vibrant nation guided by the values of peace, justice, freedom and diversity.

● (1750)

We must continue to foster this sense of pride in our history and in our veterans for the youth of this country and for all Canadians. We must keep the faith with those who paid the ultimate sacrifice for our nation. We must remember those who risked their lives to protect what we all too often take for granted.

At the going down of the sun and in the morning, we will remember them.

Mr. Brian Masse (Windsor West, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to support my colleague from Algoma—Manitoulin and Bill C-227 which would formally recognize Canada's important role in the Battle of Vimy Ridge during World War I. It was a battle that raged in France from April 9 to 12, 1917.

I support this bill because we should always do everything possible to remember and honour the efforts of the brave men who fought and died in Canada's wars. As a young Canadian I want pay specific tribute to the fact that I owe my freedom and that of my family to the ultimate sacrifice that has been made.

Recently, a paratrooper from the Korean war passed away in my constituency. I had the opportunity to give him a Queen's Jubilee medal, and at the same time we were able to get a Korean war memorial established. Mr. Jim Bradley is dearly missed in our community.

It shows the importance of why I support this bill. It is an excellent opportunity for young Canadians to once again revisit the heritage, the commitment, and the sacrifice that people have made, because we draw connections from that.

My simple message is to thank the member for putting this together, and more importantly, I am thankful for the sacrifice that Canadians have had to make for my personal freedom as well as for my community in this country of ours.

The Deputy Speaker: Is the House ready for the question?

Some hon. members: Question.

The Deputy Speaker: The question is on the motion. Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Deputy Speaker: I declare the motion carried.

(Motion agreed to, bill read the third time and passed)

ADJOURNMENT PROCEEDINGS

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

[*English*]

OFFICIAL LANGUAGES

Mr. Scott Reid (Lanark—Carleton, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, it has been four long months since I first rose in the House last October to draw attention to the fact that the RCMP was engaged in the blatantly illegal practice of issuing unilingual, French only parking tickets within the boundaries of the national capital region.

This practice was then, and still is today, a violation of section 22 of the Official Languages Act which requires that:

> Every federal institution has the duty to ensure that any member of the public can communicate with and obtain available services from its head or central office in either official language, and has the same duty with respect to any of its other offices or facilities
>
> (a) within the National Capital Region.

Since that time I have had the chance to confirm the accuracy of my interpretation of the law with the Commissioner of Official Languages. She stated in committee hearings of the House of Commons that the issuing of unilingual traffic tickets within the Quebec part of the national capital region was as illegal as it would be on the Ontario side.

As well, on December 2 the Standing Committee on Official Languages heard confirmation that the decision on the part of the government to break Canada's language laws in order to enforce the mandatory unilingualism of the Quebec government, was imposed on Canada by the current Liberal government.

Mr. Marc Tremblay, the director of the official languages law group at the Department of Justice, informed the committee that, under previous governments, infractions had been issued in the Quebec part of the national capital region in a bilingual format, as they have been and continue to be on the Ontario side of the national capital region.

Specifically, an agreement was signed in 1996 between the federal government and the Parti Québécois government under the authority of section 65 of the Contraventions Act. It was this agreement that substituted the unilingual tickets required by bill 101 for the bilingual tickets required by the Official Languages Act.

It is that agreement that the Solicitor General of Canada hides behind when time after time he responds to my questions on this issue, as he did on November 1 when he said:

> The RCMP complies with provincial legislation regarding the issuance of tickets.

However the fact is that such agreements are of no force and effect when they violate federal law, and this particular agreement is an egregious violation of the Official Languages Act.

Therefore, when the Solicitor General insists, as he repeatedly does in the House, that his government's agreement with the Parti Québécois supercedes its obligations under the Official Languages Act, he is incorrect. That just is not so.

Section 82 of the Official Languages Act makes this clear. It states:

> In the event of any inconsistency between the following Parts and any other Act of Parliament or regulation thereunder, the following Parts prevail to the extent of the inconsistency.

That cannot be overcome unless the federal government wants to pass a separate law saying that it will change the rules so that it would no longer require federal services to be provided in a bilingual format in the national capital region.

● (1755)

Tickets still are being issued in one language only in part of the national capital region. This is against the law and it continues to be against the law. Will this practice stop or does the Solicitor General plan to introduce legislation to allow for unilingual infractions in the national capital region?

Mrs. Marlene Jennings (Parliamentary Secretary to the Solicitor General of Canada, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this very issue was addressed by the Solicitor General at the request of the member for Ottawa—Vanier when he appeared before the Standing Committee on Official Languages on December 2, 2002, to address this very issue in detail.

As the minister indicated to the committee at that time, the RCMP, when operating in the national capital region, is fully committed to official bilingualism and to providing services to the public in both official languages. The RCMP works with the Commissioner of Official Languages and continually reviews programs and resources to ensure service delivery meets the requirements of the Official Languages Act.

The RCMP also ensures that bilingual staff are fully integrated into the RCMP law enforcement where required, and this includes the national capital region.

The RCMP complies with the appropriate provincial regime regarding the issuance of tickets. This compliance is not only applicable in Quebec but is equally applicable and equally carried out in all provinces across Canada.

I have been assured that bilingual guidance is provided on tickets in Quebec. I cannot speak from personal knowledge because I do not drive a car. Therefore I have never received a traffic violation but I have been assured, on good authority, that bilingual guidance is provided on tickets in Quebec and that RCMP officers who are enforcing traffic laws within the national capital region can, and indeed must, provide services as requested or needed in both official languages.

The government is committed to public safety and service delivery in both official languages, and to this end the RCMP, as our national police force, provides bilingual law enforcement while respecting the requirements of both federal and provincial laws.

Mr. Scott Reid: Mr. Speaker, I am not sure what the parliamentary secretary means by bilingual guidance. The fact is that the tickets being issued by the Royal Canadian Mounted Police in the Quebec part of the national capital region are still being issued in one language only. They are being issued in violation of the Official Languages Act. Everybody acknowledges it. The quotation that I gave from committee was given when the Solicitor General appeared and it was given by an expert appearing with the Solicitor General.

We all know this violation of the law is happening. On this occasion it is not possible to comply with federal law and to comply with an agreement that was signed with the government of Quebec. The federal government has a choice. Either it is in favour of the Official Languages Act, the law of the land in Canada, and will follow that law or it will follow the agreement it signed with the Quebec government, a decision that was taken in violation of the Official Languages Act. It has that choice.

Given the choice, does the parliamentary secretary support the federal government and the RCMP following the dictates of the Official Languages Act in the Quebec part of the national capital region or does she favour it illegally following this agreement, which is of no legal force and effect? Which of those two does she and her government favour? So far it has been in favour of breaking the federal law. What is it going to do now?

● (1800)

Mrs. Marlene Jennings: Mr. Speaker, as the member for Lanark—Carleton mentioned, the RCMP works in the national capital region in a variety of roles and functions. One of its roles is traffic enforcement in Gatineau Park on National Capital Commission property.

When it fulfills its mandate in traffic enforcement, it is complying with appropriate legislation regarding the issuance of tickets in a manner that is consistent with the law. The RCMP complies with provincial legislation in Quebec and when outside of Quebec it complies equally with the applicable legislation in the other provinces across Canada.

Again, I assure the member that I have been fully assured that bilingual guidance is provided on tickets issued in Quebec and that the RCMP officers enforcing provincial traffic within the national capital region can provide services in both official languages.

FIREARMS REGISTRY

Mr. Garry Breitkreuz (Yorkton—Melville, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, on December 12, 2002, I asked the justice minister a question, which I would like to quote:

> Parliament demonstrated its lack of confidence in the registry by removing $72 million from the scheme last week. Now the minister will be using sleight of hand to keep it on life support.
>
> What programs will he take the money from to fund the registry?

The justice minister answered:

> ...I respect this parliament and as well, the notion of transparency.

Then he went on to talk about using "cash management", but he never answered my question.

On February 18 of this year the justice minister was a little more transparent with the *National Post* than he has been with Parliament on how his cash management system-scheme really works. Here is how the minister explained cash management to the reporter:

> [If there's] some project at the present time, [it doesn't mean] that you have to pay for your project right away. You may have to pay in just 30, 60, 90 days or sometimes more. It's not called a debt, it's cash management actually.

If the rest of us do not pay our bills, it is called debt. Only the Liberal government would try to convince Canadian taxpayers that not paying its bills was actually something called cash management.

While the minister is racking up millions of dollars of debt, has he ever thought what would happen if Parliament does not approve the spending necessary to pay those bills? It has happened before: on December 5. It has been 11 weeks now and the minister still has not given us a straight answer. Where is he getting the money to run the program? How many millions has he spent since Parliament cut off the funding for the program on December 5? How many millions in bills has he not paid in the last 11 weeks?

Now we have the little $77 million discrepancy for the minister to explain. This is the difference between what the Speaker says was actually approved by Parliament in the main estimates and what the justice department and Treasury Board officials are telling the media.

On Monday, February 17, the Speaker ruled on a question of privilege by the member for Sarnia—Lambton. The Speaker said that Parliament approved $113.5 million for the gun registry in the main estimates and that the $72 million pulled from the supplementary estimates was "additional" money.

Then on Wednesday, February 19, the *Ottawa Citizen* quoted a justice department official who said the $72 million was part of the $113.5 million budgeted for that year. Today, the *Saskatoon StarPhoenix* quoted a Treasury Board official who agreed with the justice department's version of the events and claimed that Parliament had only approved $35.8 million in the main estimates.

We understand the Treasury Board official sided with the justice department's version of events, but he had to get the $35.8 million number from the justice department and everyone knows how good the justice department is with numbers. Even the $35.8 million and the $72 million do not add up to $113.5 million.

When asked for a clarification today in the House, the Speaker said that committees of the House have the power to get to the bottom of the main estimates question.

● (1805)

Maybe the parliamentary secretary can clarify the justice minister's position for the record. His officials seem to have taken a public stand that is at variance with that of the Speaker of the House and the justice minister has kept Parliament in the dark for the last 11 weeks. We can only hope that the parliamentary secretary will be a little more transparent than his boss.

So I ask him, how much money has been spent for the last 11 weeks? Where is the money coming from? How much will it cost to complete the registry?

Mr. Paul Harold Macklin (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member for Yorkton—Melville for the opportunity to answer his question.

I must begin by reiterating that the firearms programs is more than a firearms registry. The program has been designed to improve public safety by controlling access to firearms and ammunition, deterring their misuse and controlling specific types of firearms.

The Firearms Act called for the licensing of all gun owners by January 1, 2001 and the registration of all firearms by January 1, 2003. Licensing ensures that firearms owners meet high public safety standards while registration links owners to their firearms, leading to greater accountability.

I am pleased to report that we have now passed the two major deadlines associated with this program and that the majority of firearms owners have complied. Over 1.9 million Canadians are licensed and over 6.1 million firearms have been registered.

With extensive and continuous background checks on applicants and licence holders, about 9,000 firearms licences have been refused or revoked by public safety officials. That is over 70 times more revocations from potentially dangerous individuals since December 1, 1998 compared to the total for the last five years under the old program.

As for registration, it provides the link between the firearm and its rightful owner. It works to enhance accountability for one's firearms, for example by encouraging safe storage, which helps reduce gun theft and accidents. The ability to trace firearms back to their owner also facilitates police investigations and helps crack down on illegal smuggling. This information also facilitates the enforcement of prohibition orders and allows the police to take preventive action such as removing firearms from situations of domestic violence.

Already law enforcement agencies across the country are making use of this valuable tool in conducting investigations and responding to incidents such as domestic violence situations. Police are accessing information from the registry on average about 2,000 times every day.

As I mentioned before, the government remains committed to this sound public safety policy, but it has been complex and expensive to implement.

The recommendations of the Auditor General have been fully accepted and we are already acting on those recommendations. We have committed to providing Parliament annually with more complete, accurate and up to date financial and management information regarding the program. The costs of the firearms program have come down and we are determined that they will continue to decline.

Measures are being taken to address all of the Auditor General's recent recommendations regarding the gun control program. On February 3, 2003 reports from independent experts regarding the Canada firearms program were tabled in Parliament. The report by the consulting firm KPMG examined a sample of the past transactions to determine if certain internal controls were followed.

Independent management consultant Mr. Raymond Hession examined the licensing and registration processes and made 16 recommendations for improving the management and operations of the firearms program. The recommendations contained in these reports are now being considered carefully in the development of an action plan which will set out how in the future we will reduce the costs of the firearms program and improve its efficiency, service and accountability.

During the review period, the minister directed that the program be run at minimum cost, which includes operating at essential service levels only. The withdrawal of supplementary estimates for the firearms program has been compensated for on an interim basis only.

At the same time, the Firearms Act imposes legal obligations on the Department of Justice to implement Canada's firearms program. While the program will continue to operate at minimum levels until the current program review is complete, there is no question that the minister has an obligation to ensure that the requirements of the act are met.

Operating the firearms program on a short term, cash management basis has not affected other programs in the Department of Justice. We are looking at the budget of the Department of Justice to manage the shortfalls. Expenditures such as advertising, contracting and travel have been reduced. This exercise is being done to bridge the gap between the withdrawal of the supplementary estimates on December 5 and the vote of supplementary estimates B.

As the minister has said before, implementing the program has always been a challenge and it is still a challenge. However, when we look at the positive impact it has had on our society, it represents values that are highly supported by the Canadian people.

Mr. Garry Breitkreuz: Mr. Speaker, the biggest challenge is for Parliament to get an answer. Was the parliamentary secretary listening to my question? I wanted to know how much the program has cost. We did not get an answer. It did not even come close.

The parliamentary secretary went on and had this mantra about how this is gun control. It is not gun control. It is government out of control. The government does not even respect Parliament enough to answer the question.

● (1810)

The Auditor General complained that the biggest problem was that Parliament has been kept in the dark. I would like to mention something else that the Auditor General said.

The parliamentary secretary said that the requirements of the act are to be met. What did the Auditor General say? She said that the regulatory impact analysis statements of the Department of Justice that were to be followed were not followed. They were supposed to find out the costs incurred by the provincial and territorial agencies in enforcing the legislation and the additional costs incurred by firearms owners, firearms clubs, manufacturers, sellers, importers and exporters. All of this was supposed to be determined in order to comply with the legislation.

We have heard nothing about this. There is no answer here. It is a contempt of Parliament.

Mr. Paul Harold Macklin: Mr. Speaker, I understand the hyperbole of the hon. member, but the reality is the minister has stated clearly in the House that he was going to take the KPMG plan, take the Hession report and in fact build an action plan that he can present to Parliament.

In the process of doing this he is going through a review process that deals with the cost efficiencies and operations. The fact is all of these are being reviewed. They are dealing with the matter in terms of cash management within the context of the moneys that are available within the departmental budget.

Major expenditures have been stopped and frozen. Some hiring that was to take place is not taking place and some people are being laid off.

The reality is that everything possible is being done to run this program without in any way adversely affecting the most important part of this program, which is the government's continuing commitment to public safety.

[*Translation*]

The Deputy Speaker: The motion to adjourn the House is now deemed to have been adopted. Accordingly, this House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 10 a.m., pursuant to Standing Order 24(1).

(The House adjourned at 6:13 p.m.)

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