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OFFICIAL REPORT
(HANSARD)

Tuesday, May 6, 2003

—

Speaker: The Honourable Peter Milliken

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HOUSE OF COMMONS

Tuesday, May 6, 2003

The House met at 10 a.m.

Prayers

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

• (1005)

[*English*]

ORDER IN COUNCIL APPOINTMENTS

Mr. Geoff Regan (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to table, in both official languages, a number of order in council appointments made recently by the government.

Mr. Speaker, while I am on my feet, I move:

That the House do now proceed to orders of the day.

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

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

Some hon. members: Yea.

The Speaker: All those opposed will please say nay.

Some hon. members: Nay.

The Speaker: In my opinion the yeas have it.

And more than five members having risen:

The Speaker: Call in the members.

• (1035)

And the bells having rung:

Mr. John Reynolds: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. The motion to proceed to orders of the day is out of order because the motion is attempting to bypass routine proceedings without just cause and the opposition, knowing that it is against the rules to do so, did not expect the government to do this and did not have time to raise the point of order before the motion was moved.

There was a ruling on this very matter on April 13, 1987—

The Speaker: I sympathize perhaps with what the hon. member is trying to do but the point of order should have been raised before the question was put to the House if there were some procedural objection.

An hon. member: How can you raise a point of order on a—

The Speaker: The hon. member is asking how you can do it. When the motion was moved by the minister, someone should have risen on a point of order to make the objection before the Chair put the question to the House and called for the vote.

We are now called in for a vote on a motion that has been put. Had it been procedurally irregular, the challenge should have been made, in my view, prior to the question being put to the House, which is the normal practice on motions as hon. members know.

Accordingly, the question is on the motion.

• (1045)

[*Translation*]

(The House divided on the motion, which was agreed to on the following division:)

(*Division No. 153*)

YEAS

Members

Adams
Allard
Assadourian
Bagnell
Beaumier
Bertrand
Binet
Bonin
Boudria
Brown
Bulte
Caccia
Caplan
Castonguay
Charbonneau
Coderre
Comuzzi
Cullen
DeVillers
Dromisky
Duplain
Eggleton
Finlay
Fontana
Godfrey
Graham
Harvey
Jackson
Jordan
Keyes

Alcock
Anderson (Victoria)
Augustine
Barnes (London West)
Bélanger
Bevilacqua
Blondin-Andrew
Bonwick
Bradshaw
Bryden
Byrne
Calder
Carroll
Catterall
Chrétien
Collenette
Cotler
Cuzner
Dion
Drouin
Easter
Farrah
Folco
Frulla
Goodale
Harvard
Hubbard
Jennings
Karetak-Lindell
Knutson

Government Orders

Kraft Sloan	Lastewka
Leung	Lincoln
Longfield	MacAulay
Macklin	Mahoney
Maloney	Manley
Marleau	McCallum
McGuire	McKay (Scarborough East)
McLellan	Mills (Toronto—Danforth)
Minna	Mitchell
Murphy	Myers
Nault	Neville
O'Brien (London—Fanshawe)	O'Reilly
Pacetti	Pagtakhan
Paradis	Patry
Péric	Peschisolido
Pettigrew	Pickard (Chatham—Kent Essex)
Pillitteri	Pratt
Price	Proulx
Redman	Reed (Halton)
Regan	Robillard
Rock	Saada
Savoy	Sgro
Shepherd	Speller
St-Jacques	St-Julien
St. Denis	Szabo
Thibault (West Nova)	Thibeault (Saint-Lambert)
Tirabassi	Tonks
Torsney	Vanclief
Whelan	Wilfert— 118

NAYS

Members

Abbott	Ablonczy
Anderson (Cypress Hills—Grasslands)	Bailey
Bigras	Blaikie
Borotsik	Bourgeois
Breitkreuz	Cardin
Casey	Casson
Crête	Davies
Day	Desjarlais
Desrochers	Doyle
Duceppe	Forsyth
Gagnon (Québec)	Gagnon (Lac-Saint-Jean—Saguenay)
Gallant	Gaudet
Gauthier	Gouk
Grewal	Guay
Guimond	Harper
Harris	Hill (Macleod)
Hill (Prince George—Peace River)	Hinton
Jaffer	Johnston
Keddy (South Shore)	Kenney (Calgary Southeast)
Laframboise	Lalonde
Lebel	Lill
Lunney (Nanaimo—Alberni)	Martin (Winnipeg Centre)
Ménard	Meredith
Merrifield	Mills (Red Deer)
Nystrom	Obhrai
Penson	Picard (Drummond)
Rajotte	Reid (Lanark—Carleton)
Reynolds	Ritz
Rocheleau	Sauvageau
Schmidt	Skelton
Solberg	Spencer
St-Hilaire	Strahl
Thompson (Wild Rose)	Wasylycia-Leis
White (North Vancouver)	Williams
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PAIRED

Nil

The Speaker: I declare the motion carried.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

*[English]***AN ACT TO AMEND THE CRIMINAL CODE (CRUELTY TO ANIMALS AND FIREARMS) AND THE FIREARMS ACT**

BILL C-10—TIME ALLOCATION MOTION

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

That in relation to Bill C-10, an act to amend the Criminal Code (cruelty to animals and firearms) and the Firearms Act, not more than one further sitting day shall be allotted to the stage of consideration of Senate amendments to the bill and, fifteen minutes before the expiry of the time provided for government business on the allotted day of the consideration of the said stage of the said bill, any proceedings before the House shall be interrupted, if required for the purpose of this order, and in turn every question necessary for the disposal of the said stage of the bill shall be put forthwith and successively without further debate or amendment.

*[Translation]***The Speaker:** Pursuant to Standing Order 67.1 there will now be a 30 minute question period.*[English]***Mr. Stephen Harper (Leader of the Opposition, Canadian Alliance):** Mr. Speaker, we have yet another Liberal closure motion but it does give me an opportunity to question the government a little bit indepth about the firearms registry, boondoggle.

The House will recall that we were sold this bill of goods that it would cost \$2 million. This party warned that it would cost much more. The member for Yorkton—Melville did heroic work for years providing evidence that this would cost hundreds of millions of dollars. The government denied this systematically and covered it up, but it has now been revealed that we are up to about \$1 billion in expenditures on this with absolutely no end in sight.

We have been putting a series of questions to the government for months. I would appreciate if, after all these months with this new bill, it could finally answer these questions today. How much will it cost to complete this firearm registry, when will it be completed, and how much will it cost to maintain?

● (1050)

Hon. Wayne Easter (Solicitor General of Canada, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to outline the costs for the hon. member because he has been talking about what his colleague from Yorkton—Melville has been doing in terms of outlining the costs. The motion today is about getting Bill C-10A through the House, which will in fact reduce the costs.

Government Orders

Let me outline the worst year of costs for the Canadian firearms centre. The opposition alleges that all the costs are with the registry. I will outline those figures in detail for the year 2000-01: public administration was \$10,670,000; communication and public affairs was \$34,820,000; firearms registration, the area the opposition is always talking about, was \$40,362,000; program delivery was \$114,216,000; and the national weapons enforcement support team, which does all the good work in terms of finding illegal weapons and which is part of the purpose for the program in the first place, was \$296,000. That totals \$200,364,000. Those are the real facts and that was the worst year of costs.

We want to ensure that we pass Bill C-10A to create some efficiencies in the system and save money for Canadians.

Mr. Stephen Harper: Mr. Speaker, the only way we will save costs on this program is to scrap this registry and put the money into public safety.

The minister should be ashamed of himself for coming here with a whole bunch of costs and not being able to answer my questions on what this will cost and when it will be finished, but this is typical of the government. I am hardly surprised because this reflects its entire criminal justice agenda. It has nothing to do with public safety. Instead, it is just wasting money and being soft on crime.

We have Bill C-23 which frankly should be renamed the sex offender protection act because the only people in the country it protects are sex offenders. We have Bill C-20 that has loopholes for child pornography. I could go on and on. Under its watch the government has allowed convicts the right to vote.

Can the government explain why it is so soft on criminals and is never prepared to take real action on crime?

Hon. Wayne Easter: Mr. Speaker, the leader of the official opposition is implying that this system does not make streets safer. Let me provide a couple of examples.

A public safety warrant was executed after an individual threatened several employees of local businesses and a school principal. As the individual lived directly across from the school, there was concern that he would follow through with his threats. The search warrant allowed police to find a number of shotguns and rifles unsafely stored in a closet in the individual's home. All the firearms were seized and the individual was subsequently prohibited from owning firearms and the guns that were found in his home were disposed of. That is making safer streets and the members in the official opposition do not want to admit that.

Let me explain what this bill would really do. If the opposition were to let us pass Bill C-10A we could save money. I will name a few of the possible effects that it would have. It would simplify the requirements for licence renewals, which members opposite should want; it would stagger firearm licence renewals to avoid a surge of applications in five year cycles; it would increase the use of the Internet for applications and the issuance of documents, which is making great efficiencies; it would establish a pre-application process for temporary importation of non-resident visitors; and it would streamline the transfer process of firearms from one owner to another. That is helping to create efficiencies within the system.

• (1055)

Mr. Garry Breitkreuz (Yorkton—Melville, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, it is pretty obvious the minister is not answering our questions.

I have a question for him. RCMP testing has confirmed that many air guns, pellet guns, and even some BB guns exceed both the muzzle energy and muzzle velocity requirements in Bill C-10A and would have to be registered as soon as Bill C-10A is proclaimed. This would drive up the costs, contrary to what the minister has just said. There may be as many as one million air gun owners, and two or three million pellet guns and BB guns in Canada.

Would the minister tell us how much it will cost to register all of these guns?

Hon. Wayne Easter: Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Justice went before the estimates committee and outlined some of those costs. Maybe the member should have listened more closely at that point in time. However, the best way to look at what the costs to the system would be is to look at the history. I outlined to his leader a moment ago what the costs were in 2000-01. As we can see from those figures, the costs that the member opposite talks about most of the time are greatly exaggerated.

The fact of the matter is, regarding his question on Bill C-10A, this proposal would make it possible for us to create better efficiencies in the system and that is what members opposite should be wanting us to do.

Hon. Lorne Nystrom (Regina—Qu'Appelle, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the bill before the House today is a bill that was divided by the Senate. I have known the minister for a long while and I thought he had some progressive views about parliamentary reform. By accepting this bill that was divided by the Senate, the House is accepting the fact that the Senate, even though it is not elected, not democratic, and not accountable, has the power to divide a legislative bill. I do not think that is proper.

Would the minister reconsider his position because by accepting this bill in the House he is accepting a decision that the Senate made to divide the bill.

This bill was introduced last October. It went to the Senate in November and the Senate divided the bill into the firearms part and the cruelty to animals part. Today we have the firearms part back in the House. By accepting that, we are accepting the fact that the Senate has the right in a democratic society to divide legislation. I think that is dead wrong. It is not elected, not accountable, and not democratic, and it is thwarting the will of the people of Canada. I want the minister to respond to that because I used to think he was a pretty democratic guy.

Government Orders

Hon. Wayne Easter: Absolutely, Mr. Speaker, I am a very democratic individual, as are all my colleagues on this side of the House. We believe in democracy and debate. In fact, the point of the issue on this, as we talk about democracy, is that debate is democracy. There was a total of 15 days of debate on this bill in the House. That is over 36 hours. There were five days of debate in the other place. That is a lot of debate on the issue.

In terms of splitting the bill, previous Speakers have ruled that it is fine, it does not impede democracy. From my previous experience, going before both House of Commons and Senate committees as a farm leader, the Senate often raises good questions in debate but in a much more non-partisan sense. In fact, it does not get into the politics of the thing and exaggerates issues, as has the official opposition. Sometimes we can even have better debate in the Senate than we can here. That may seem strange but that is true, and it cuts both ways. There has been a lot of debate on this issue.

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant (Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, police chiefs across Canada are withdrawing their support for the government's firearms registry and are going public with their complaints. The president of the Ontario Association of Chiefs of Police has stated that they will not be charging people under this law until the problems are resolved. They have written to the justice minister requesting that the implementation of the law be put on hold.

Can the minister explain how the firearms registry will be enforced when police are refusing to charge those who do not comply?

• (1100)

Hon. Wayne Easter: Mr. Speaker, this is an extremely important question, but I am concerned by what the member is suggesting may happen.

When the House of Commons passes laws in this country, the police have an obligation to uphold those laws. I hope the member opposite is not advocating that the police in Canada do not enforce the laws passed by the House of Commons. The police have a responsibility and an obligation to enforce those laws.

In fact, the Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police, the Canadian Police Association, and the Ottawa police chief are in support of the legislation. They believe it does make safer communities and streets.

Mr. Gerald Keddy (South Shore, PC): Mr. Speaker, I recall the days when the hon. member used to speak against gun control well before he was Solicitor General. In committee and in debate he was not the rabid gun control fan that he seems to be since he became minister.

On December 5, 2002, the Progressive Conservative justice critic, the member for Pictou—Antigonish—Guysborough, saved Canadians \$72 million by having that amount of money withdrawn from the estimates. I would think that because the \$72 million had to be withdrawn by the government, it did not have the money in its coffers to continue to bankroll this \$1 billion mistake that it has made.

Where did the government find the money to continue with the gun control registry? If it diverted money from other means, how did

it meet its payroll, and how could it do that and be consistent with the comments that the Auditor General made of how it was circumventing Parliament and getting the money to begin with?

Hon. Wayne Easter: Mr. Speaker, the member is roaring across the aisle that what we cannot do by the front door we are doing by the back door. Nothing could be further from the truth.

We have said on this side of the House that there have been extensive costs to this program. Through Bill C-10A, we have found ways to make the gun registry more efficient. We need the legislative obligations which are laid out in Bill C-10A in order to put those efficiencies in place.

I understand the opposition by some to the program. The intent of the gun control issue, as the member fully knows, is not to make criminals out of legitimate gun owners. They have a right to those guns. However, there are certain obligations they must follow through on that are part of the gun control program.

The specifics of the hon. member's question pertained to costs. One of the reasons why, as outlined in the presentation before the estimates, and one of the difficulties in terms of administering the program and getting registrations on the phone-in system is that we had to cut back on resources and on people on the other end of those phones because of the reduction of the amount of money the member talked about. It added to our problem of inefficiencies in the system because that money was withdrawn.

Mr. Monte Solberg (Medicine Hat, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, the minister mentioned a lot of interesting things in a short time. He talked about how we should not be making legitimate gun owners criminals, but neither should we be making taxpayers paupers. That is exactly what the registry is doing.

The minister talked about extensive costs. That is putting it mildly. We are talking about something that was supposed to cost \$2 million. It is now closing in on \$1 billion. That would buy over 200 MRI machines and also train the people to run them. If this were about saving lives, clearly that would be a better way to proceed.

The minister talked about people who oppose the registry and he understands why. The minister should, of course, because as the member mentioned just a minute ago, he used to oppose it too until all of a sudden he became a minister and everything changed.

I want to talk specifically about his comments on being a democrat. If we are democrats, does that not mean we listen to the will of the public? When the public is saying in a recent poll that 53% want the registry scrapped, a democrat would listen.

When will this alleged democrat across the way start listening to the Canadian public and scrap that registry?

• (1105)

Hon. Wayne Easter: Mr. Speaker, there was a lot of hot air but not much substance in that comment. Let us get to the facts in terms of the \$2 million cost. Admittedly so, it was the net cost of the program as originally estimated. The member talks about the \$1 billion figure. We are not at \$1 billion; by 2005 we may reach that point.

Government Orders

I do want to make this point. The members are saying that I was opposed to this system and that since I became a minister I now support it. I think it would be useful if members opposite went back to look at the voting record in *Hansard*. They will see how I voted on this issue. Certainly I have debated, as have many members of our caucus; I see some of them sitting here. I have debated within our own caucus and within the House some of the concerns we had on the gun registry. We did have concerns. We tried to improve it.

That is what we are trying to do today: improve the bill to meet the concerns of the people within our party and some of the concerns of the people opposite and certainly of the general public.

On the last point on democracy, the member says to listen to the will of the public. That is what we are trying to do. The public said yes, they want this system, but they want it run efficiently.

If we could ever get to voting on Bill C-10A, we could create some of those efficiencies in the system that the public wants. That is what we are trying to do by getting this bill through the House of Commons, but the opposition members continue to try to disrupt us. Twenty days of debate between the two houses is unbelievable.

Hon. Lorne Nystrom: Mr. Speaker, my supplementary is for the minister. What I was asking for is his opinion on whether or not the Senate should have the right to split a bill. It is not elected and not democratic. The gun registry, by the way, is a money bill, which makes it even more serious.

I have known the minister for a number of years and I know that he was outspoken. Just because he is now a minister of the crown does not mean that he has become a political eunuch. He still has his own mind, his own brain, his own opinion.

In his opinion, is it the proper thing to do to have the Senate split a bill like this when the senators are not elected, particularly when it is a money bill?

Hon. Wayne Easter: Mr. Speaker, I think I answered the member's question earlier. The fact of the matter is that the Senate is appointed. It is a part of our democratic system. It is the sober house of second thought. In terms of the cruelty to animals part of the splitting, I would hope that there is some sober second thought over there. This will proceed through the system. There will be a good debate on both issues and at the end of the day we expect better legislation. That is what the other place is all about; sober second thought on some of these issues. It is part of our democratic system. I think we should be proud of it.

Mr. Bill Casey (Cumberland—Colchester, PC): Mr. Speaker, the minister has said that he has to have an efficient system, but I think it also has to be effective and credible. I would like him to explain how it can be credible when a man in my riding registered one firearm but got five registrations; so now the police, who are depending on this registry to know how many firearms this man has, think he has five. Another man registered five guns but only got two registrations. Another man sent money a year and a half ago and has nothing. Another person has registered 18 firearms and the system registered 36 firearms.

How can anyone have any faith in the system with this incredible amount of inefficiency and error in the system?

● (1110)

Hon. Wayne Easter: Mr. Speaker, I am not denying for a moment that there are not bad examples out there. There are.

In fact, in Regina about two weeks ago I talked to a gun shop owner. He spent, in my view, much too long on the telephone trying to register in that case a twenty-two, I believe, that had a duplicate number. That should not happen in the system. I agree with the hon. member. There are problems within the system and there are examples out there, and I am not denying that, not for a minute.

What we are trying to do through the bill and what I am trying to do personally is talk to some of those individuals, and the new chief executive officer at the Canadian Firearms Centre, Mr. Baker, is trying to do the same, because we want to talk directly to those people who have problems and we want to fix those problems. That is what this bill is all about: making the system work efficiently and effectively. That is what we want to do.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Rahim Jaffer (Edmonton—Strathcona, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, the firearms registry was imposed on Canadians with the promise that it would cost only \$2 million. The government was wrong, which is not surprising. This program has cost, to date, nearly 500 times more than the initial estimate.

Last fall, the Auditor General published a scathing report on the government's bad management of this program.

For the past three months, the Canadian Alliance has tried to get an honest answer from the minister. Can he tell us how much the implementation and maintenance of this program will cost?

[*English*]

Hon. Wayne Easter: Mr. Speaker, the member's question is not what today's motion is about. There will be a chance to get into that kind of detail when we go to estimates.

What I can do is talk about past history. I have already outlined that, where, yes, there have been extensive costs. The Auditor General made a report, a very well documented report, and we appreciate having received that report from her. It was not good news, I will admit that. There was bad news in it, but what this government and what I as the minister now responsible for the firearms centre are willing to do is look at this. We have said that we would adopt those recommendations. We will accept them and in fact some of them are in Bill C-10A, this bill that we are talking about. We want to learn from what the Auditor General said and create efficiencies in the system and manage the system more effectively.

That is what I cannot understand: Where is the official opposition on this? On one hand it is talking about the program costing too much money, and I admit it is, but we want the program to cost less money and to be more efficient, and yet those members will not give us the opportunity to make this program more efficient and have safer streets in the process.

Government Orders

Mr. Gerald Keddy (South Shore, PC): Mr. Speaker, I listened to the Solicitor General's remarks and I appreciate the fact that he recognizes the registry is costing too much money, but I know for a fact that at one time in the member's career he raised dairy cows and I am certain he is also aware of the fact that we manage to register 28 million head of livestock, cows alone, in this country for somewhere around \$2 million a year. Each of those cows has a serial number and each has its sire and dam written down. To waste \$1 billion on something that should have cost \$4 million or \$5 million cannot be excused and he cannot find a way to justify it.

My final point is quite clear. The former minister of justice who used to have this portfolio, the member from Etobicoke, tried to make his mark on this registry and become the next prime minister of Canada. He made a mark. It cost \$1 billion. This member is going to leave—

• (1115)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bélair): The hon. Solicitor General.

Hon. Wayne Easter: Mr. Speaker, I will say this on the member's question. When the program he is talking about was started, I believe Charlie Gracey was the president of the Canadian Cattlemen's Association at the time, or at least he was one of the consultants on that national cattle identification program. It is an exceptionally good program, no question about it. Twenty-five million livestock are registered, transfers are happening, sales are happening, and some are going to slaughter.

They are doing that and I congratulate them for doing it, but this is like comparing apples and oranges in terms of this particular program. There is a 95% compliance rate with the NCIP, but in the beginning there was considerable opposition to the program, the same as there is with this program.

I believe that if government can get the message out of what this program is all about, it is that the intent is not to criminalize legitimate gun owners. It is not; it is to make safer streets and safer communities. We want to do that. Without Bill C-10A, which we are having the discussion on, the firearms centre, taxpayers are incurring costs to maintain and operate the old system as well as costs for the new system. We need this piece of legislation so that we are working with the new system, a more efficient system, and so we can provide the kinds of services that Canadians want in an efficient way.

Mr. Grant Hill (MacLeod, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, just as an aside, it is interesting to note that there were 18 Tory senators who voted for Bill C-68, and without those votes we would not have the firearms registry.

My colleague down the way talked about the police and the individuals who said that they would not be enforcing this law. There is another problem for the minister opposite and that is the provinces that will not support this law and say that they want it scrapped.

My question is directed to the minister. How will the law be enforced when a number of provinces, eight of them in fact, say that they do not want the registry in their jurisdictions? What will he do about that?

Hon. Wayne Easter: Mr. Speaker, we want to work with the provinces and work together in the way that this country was intended to work, with the provinces and federal government

working together, and we are going to sit down and try to do that. If we have to go our own way we may have to do that too, but I want to come back to what was said earlier, I believe by this member, about the Association of Chiefs of Police.

This is what Chief Vince Bevan of the association had to say and I think this sums it all up:

Information is the lifeblood of policing. Without information about who owns and has guns, there is no way to prevent violence or effectively enforce the law. This law is a useful tool which has already begun to show its value in a number of police investigations.

There is a second quote from the same individual:

We have seen a number of concrete examples of police investigations that have been aided by access to the information in the registry.

If the party over there were as interested in law and order as it claims, it would be supporting us today instead of jeopardizing and causing disruptions in getting these efficiencies through the system.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bélair): It is my duty to interrupt the proceedings at this time and put forthwith the question on the motion now before the House. The question is on the motion. Is 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.

• (1205)

(The House divided on the motion, which was agreed to on the following division)

(Division No. 154)

YEAS

Members

Adams	Alcock
Allard	Anderson (Victoria)
Assad	Assadourian
Augustine	Bagnell
Barnes (London West)	Beaumier
Bélanger	Bennett
Bertrand	Bevilacqua
Binet	Blondin-Andrew
Bonin	Bonwick
Boudria	Bradshaw
Brown	Bryden
Bulte	Byrne
Caccia	Calder
Caplan	Carroll
Castonguay	Catterall
Charbonneau	Chrétien
Coderre	Collenette

Comuzzi
Cullen
DeVillers
Dromisky
Duplain
Eggleton
Finlay
Fontana
Fry
Goodale
Harvard
Jackson
Jordan
Keyes
LeBlanc
Lincoln
MacAulay
Mahoney
Manley
McCallum
McKay (Scarborough East)
Mills (Toronto—Danforth)
Mitchell
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Robillard
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Frulla
Godfrey
Graham
Harvey
Jennings
Karetak-Lindell
Knutson
Lee
Longfield
Macklin
Maloney
Marcel
McGuire
McLellan
Minna
Murphy
Nault
O'Brien (London—Fanshawe)
Pacetti
Paradis
Peschisolido
Pettigrew
Pillitteri
Price
Redman
Regan
Rock
Savoy
Sgro
Speller
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NAYS

Members

Abbott
Anderson (Cypress Hills—Grasslands)
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Desrochers
Duceppe
Gagnon (Québec)
Gallant
Gauthier
Grewal
Guimond
Herron
Hill (Macleod)
Jaffer
Keddy (South Shore)
Laframboise
Lunney (Nanaimo—Alberni)
Martin (Winnipeg Centre)
Ménard
Mills (Red Deer)
Nystrom
Paquette
Picard (Drummond)
Rajotte
Ritz
Rocheleau
Schmidt
Solberg

Abloncy
Bailey
Bigras
Borotsik
Breitkreuz
Cardin
Casson
Crête
Davies
Desjarlais
Doyle
Forseth
Gagnon (Lac-Saint-Jean—Saguenay)
Gaudet
Gouk
Guay
Harris
Hill (Prince George—Peace River)
Hinton
Johnston
Kenney (Calgary Southeast)
Lebel
Marceau
Masse
Merrifield
Moore
Obhrai
Penson
Proctor
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Members

Asselin
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Girard-Bujold
Kilgour (Edmonton Southeast)
Martin (LaSalle—Émard)
McCormick
Roy
Stewart

Bergeron
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Gagnon (Champlain)
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The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bélair): I declare the motion carried.

CONCURRENCE IN SENATE AMENDMENTS

The House resumed from April 7 consideration of the motion in relation to the amendments made by the Senate to Bill C-10, an act to amend the Criminal Code (cruelty to animals and firearms) and the Firearms Act, and of the amendment and of the amendment to the amendment.

The Deputy Speaker: I wish to inform the House that because of the proceedings on the time allocation motion, government orders will be extended by 30 minutes.

Mrs. Marlene Jennings (Parliamentary Secretary to the Solicitor General of Canada, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to rise today to talk about the Government of Canada's dedication and commitment to public safety and to the firearms program.

The gun control program is designed to enhance public safety and to reduce the number of firearm related injuries and deaths. The program is keeping guns out of the hands of those who should not have these firearms and helping those who do have the firearms in their efforts to be responsible and accountable for their use. The program is also providing police with valuable investigative tools to prevent crime and to cut down on gun smuggling. This is what police officers themselves are telling us.

Both the licensing and registration are key elements in achieving the program safety objectives. Licensing ensures that firearm owners meet high public safety standards while the registration links one owner to one firearm ensuring greater accountability. The registration of all firearms enables law enforcement officers across Canada to track firearms, to identify stolen firearms and to distinguish legally owned firearms from those acquired illegally. Registration also facilitates the enforcement of probation orders and allows police to take preventive action, such as removing firearms from situations of domestic violence.

It is quite interesting, and perhaps the members from the opposite side might like to hear this and learn from this, that the police find both licensing and registration to be valuable in their work.

At a news conference this past January David Griffin, the executive officer for the Canadian Police Association stated:

We... consider the licensing of firearms owners and the registration of firearms to be a valuable public safety tool for front-line police officers... It would be irresponsible to suspend or abandon any element of this program, now that it is starting to deliver the intended results.

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This comes straight from the mouth of David Griffin, executive officer for the Canadian Police Association.

Police officers have access to certain information contained in the firearms registry. This information is gathered in the firearms registry online, also known as CFRO. Law enforcement officers have queried the system for information regarding individuals who may own firearms or may have firearms in their possession more than two million times since it was launched on December 1, 1998. They did this for the safety of Canadians.

These police officers have received information about the number and types of firearms that may be involved in the course of an investigation which they are currently conducting. Police officers en route to a call from a residence have been able to find out in seconds if a firearm licence or a registration certificate is listed for that residence. The system also helps police officers trace the owners of found, recovered or seized firearms.

The Canadian firearms program yields significant savings for police services. How does it do that? The police are no longer burdened with the paperwork and administration involved in accepting firearms applications because these are now mailed to a central processing site. This in turn frees up significant police time and resources that can be and are directed to investigation and other important police work.

●(1210)

In January 2001 the national weapons enforcement support team, NWEST, was created. NWEST is a network of highly trained and experienced individuals located throughout Canada. NWEST works in a support role with local law enforcement in their criminal investigations that may involve firearms and it assists in anti-trafficking and anti-smuggling efforts. The NWEST team also helps the police community in dealing with issues of violence with firearms. Allow me to give two examples.

While responding to a call from a concerned family member, police in a major city noted that a male in the house was very despondent. Seven long guns were in plain view stored in an unlocked cabinet and were seized to protect the six residents of the home. A check of the firearms registry by these same police officers discovered that the owner also had more than 20 restricted firearms which he had failed to disclose during a police interview.

Family members, upon questioning, stated that they did not know that these handguns were scattered all over the house. Some were concealed between bed mattresses while others were hidden in the ceiling. At that particular call, police also seized 45,000 rounds of ammunition and more than 15 pounds of gun powder from that same residence.

Is that an example of how the firearms registry operates and is indeed a safety tool for police officers in their law enforcement work? I think it is.

In another case following the discovery of a machine gun in the trunk of a vehicle, police in a western Canadian city checked the firearms registry and discovered that the gun was registered to a local gun collector who had not reported the gun lost or stolen. This allowed the police to obtain a search warrant. They determined that several guns were missing from that local gun collector's collection

of almost 400 firearms and the registered owner was apparently not even aware that they had gone missing. Although most of the collection was legally registered, several guns were not.

That is another example of how the firearms registry is indeed assisting police officers in doing their job of law enforcement and ensuring public safety. That is according to the police themselves.

Since its launch in January 2001, the national weapons enforcement support team, or NWEST, has provided assistance to almost 3,000 police investigations like those in the two examples I just cited. They have conducted more than 1,800 firearms traces and have provided about 500 information sessions to the policing community. On April 1 NWEST moved from the Canadian Firearms Centre to the national police services, which is administered, as I am sure all members in the House know, by the RCMP.

How does our program, the firearms registry, assist in dealing with the illegal gun market? This is what Ottawa police chief Vince Bevan, vice-president of the Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police, said:

The new law brings us in line with other industrialized nations and is an important part of a coordinated international effort to fight the illicit trafficking of firearms and organized crime.

He went on to say:

Improving the regulation of legal firearms is critical to preventing their diversion to illegal markets.

I am not making this up; this is a direct quote from Vince Bevan, Ottawa's chief of police and also vice-president of the Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police. That is what the police have to say about the firearms registry. That is what they have to say about the gun control program.

●(1215)

The Government of Canada is committed to gun control and to the firearms program. Our preventive approach to firearms safety is not only supported by Canadians, it is also endorsed by safety experts across the country.

I know that some members on the opposite side of the House do not want to hear that. They would like to lead Canadians into believing that the very individuals and professionals who use the registry do not support the registry. But that is not the case. These groups are among the many stakeholders who continue to push for gun control in Canada and who have spoken out in support of the firearms program on numerous occasions.

For example, in a news release from the Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police last February, Pierre-Paul Pichette, assistant director, Service de police de la Ville de Montréal, said:

Gun control is an investment in public safety and there is already promising evidence of its effectiveness.

The firearms program has already proven to be an effective tool to protect the safety of Canadians. It promotes safe and responsible firearms use while keeping firearms out of the hands of those who pose a risk to themselves or to others.

The government's approach to gun control is supported by a majority of Canadians, including those on the front lines: the police, health workers and victims advocates.

Government Orders

While the firearms program is still in its infancy, we can clearly see the benefits for enforcement agencies and to the Canadian public.

Allow me to add a few words on the government's commitment to improve services to the Canadian public to make this process as user friendly and efficient as possible.

As mentioned in the action plan tabled earlier this year, the government has committed to improve client service throughout the program. This includes a 30 day turnaround for registration applications which are received with accurate and complete information.

The government recognizes that there are still individuals who have yet to bring themselves in compliance with the law. Despite what program opponents would have us believe, there has never been any intention of penalizing law-abiding Canadians. Therefore, I will join my colleague the Solicitor General in encouraging people to act now.

For those who are listening, there are two options available for people to register their firearms.

The first option is online. It is free and available 24 hours a day. As part of our commitment to improve client service, online registration was reintroduced earlier this year. Online registration has been a success with over 425,000 individuals using this service. This includes over 44,000 individuals who have used the online service since it was reintroduced earlier this year.

The second option available for people to register their firearms is to order a form through the 1-800-731-4000 telephone number. The call centre is operational 16 hours each day. The centre handles an average of 4,000 calls per day.

There are still people who have not yet applied for a licence. I urge these individuals to act without delay as they cannot register their firearms without a licence. Perhaps more important, by taking the time to comply, we will have a firearms program even better able to achieve its potential in contributing to public safety.

The program will be undergoing many changes over the next several months. Legislative amendments will allow the program to evolve and make better use of existing technologies in order to better accommodate our clients.

● (1220)

New licence terms and a simplifying of the business licence requirements will enhance client service while maintaining the public safety principles of Canada's gun control program.

To conclude, I would like to add that the program's success stems largely from the solid partnerships that have been forged between government agencies, the law enforcement community and many stakeholders, but most important, from the ongoing support of the Canadian public. Canadians believe in public safety. Canadians see gun control as an essential requirement to achieving public safety in Canada.

Mr. Roy Bailey (Souris—Moose Mountain, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, as a member who has been around on this issue for many years, I want to tell the hon. member opposite that for years we have had an FAC, a firearms acquisition certificate. People had to

have that before they could register a firearm. Where would people go to get a firearms acquisition certificate? They had to go to the RCMP who checked people's character references thoroughly and then they could register.

The minister has just mentioned that we can get a firearm registered on line. I want to tell the member opposite that senior police officers in my constituency are seeing people getting their firearms registered of whom they disapproved under the firearms certificate.

We have heard thousands of lies come out of this office. Now we are being begged to believe what we are being told.

Eight provinces said no way, they will not prosecute. The member quoted two police officers saying that this program is acceptable.

Another point I would like to make is this. We had in our province for years a firearms hunter's safety program where kids, my own grandchildren, have gone through the program. It has been proven across Canada to be of great benefit.

Now we are told that we will probably have to have government trainers conduct this program. That program was all done free of charge by the way. It will be more costly, with more disrespect. We should be saying to those eight provinces, let us get the paperwork and the mess straightened out, which is what the provinces are saying, before we prosecute anyone under the act.

The act has been a dismal failure. Any member who stands up to say that it has been a success certainly has not followed the act along its way.

Mrs. Marlene Jennings: Mr. Speaker, I beg to disagree with the hon. member on the opposite side.

Law enforcement officers are our front line. The national associations and their representatives have stated clearly that the firearms registry and the gun control program are a success. They are producing a positive effect for them and allowing them to put their resources where they need to be put rather than on the administration of the system that the member on the opposite side referred to which previously was the firearms acquisition certificate system.

As to whether or not this program is effective in ensuring that individuals who should not have possession or licensing of firearms, the government and the police themselves have published statistics as to the number of individuals who had firearms who have been refused the opportunity to have the right to have a licence to possess firearms. That is as a result of this system.

Government Orders

When the front line officers themselves who use this tell us that they have used the system more than two million times since it was first instituted and that they have been able to use it in ongoing police investigations, I take them at their word. I would hope that the member on the opposite side would also take Vince Bevan at his word, take Pierre-Paul Pichette at his word. They speak on behalf of the association for which each of them were speaking and they are accurately responding and explaining the views of their membership. I take them at their word. I would hope that the member would take them at their word and not impugn, as he has done, the validity of the statements that they have made on behalf of their associations, the Canadian Police Association and the Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police.

• (1225)

Mr. Gerald Keddy (South Shore, PC): Mr. Speaker, I just walked into the House and I only heard the end of the hon. member's comments about the Association of Police Chiefs.

Since this is questions and comments and she has made the reference to police chiefs, I guess my question is this. I do not think I have ever seen in my short career in politics any more blatant lobbying on behalf of a significant part of Canadian society as the chiefs of police. I told them that when they lobbied me in my office.

The fact is that the government deliberately brought them to Ottawa on the day of the vote. I do not think that is something to brag about as a government. I think that is something to be embarrassed about. I do not think it is the government's job to manipulate the chiefs of police, nor is it the responsibility of the chiefs of police to allow themselves to be manipulated.

I think there are two wrongs and it certainly does not make it right.

Mrs. Marlene Jennings: Mr. Speaker, I am astonished and appalled by the statements made by the member on the other side. Once again we have a member, who purports to represent the views of Canadians, impugning the integrity of elected officials of the Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police. I would assume that he would then broaden his comments to include the Canadian Police Association, which represents the frontline officers, on its good faith and on its objective and impartial analysis of Canada's gun control program and firearms registry program. I am appalled that the member would have the gumption to stand in the House and make statements like that.

I wish the hon. member would have the same gumption to stand outside the House and make those kinds of statements, impugning the words, the opinion, the impartiality and the integrity of the chief of police of Ottawa, Vince Bevin; David Griffin of the Canadian Police Association; and Pierre-Paul Pichette, assistant director of the Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police.

I will not in any way endorse or let anyone listening to this debate believe that on this side of the House the government does not believe in the integrity of the members of the Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police and the Canadian Police Association. We believe that they are impartial and that they are people of integrity. We also believe in them even when we do not always agree with some of their positions.

Is it not distasteful for the members that on this particular occasion the Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police and the Canadian Police Association have come out in support of Canada's gun control program and firearms registry program? Obviously the members of certain parties on the opposite side, the Progressive Conservatives and the Canadian Alliance, have attempted to stake their reputation on destroying this effective public safety tool, this effective law enforcement tool.

On this side of the House we will not have it. We will represent Canadians who support these programs. We agree with the Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police and the Canadian Police Association. For once we are on the same side on a particular program. However even when we are not on the same side, never do we disrespect them or impugn their integrity and impartiality. We may disagree but we know that these are valuable organizations and that the people who make up these organizations have valuable experience to bring to the House, to the government and to Canadian society. I say shame on that member.

• (1230)

Hon. Lorne Nystrom (Regina—Qu'Appelle, NDP): Mr. Speaker, what an act to follow. Methinks the member doth protest too much. It is absolutely amazing. The member from the Conservative Party has said what he said in the House outside the House to the police associations. What a tempest in a teapot.

I want to tell the member across the way that it is not just the Alliance and Conservative members who oppose the gun registry. I also oppose it. I am also proud of our Saskatchewan NDP government which has opposed the gun registry. I am very proud of the Manitoba NDP government which has also opposed the gun registry. I am pleased that the NDP Governments of Saskatchewan and Manitoba are not co-operating in the implementation of this law. I think they reflect public opinion as well.

This sanctimonious attitude of the Liberal Party that it has the divine right to do what is good and right in this country and that it stands for public opinion and for the people is a bunch of baloney. Those are the kinds of comments in debate that are not helpful at all.

The member across the way should know that this is not an ideological issue across the country. I do not agree with most of the stances taken by the Canadian Alliance but on this particular issue we happen to be on the same score card, on the same side.

We have a long record. The Saskatchewan government was part of the court action challenging the federal law. The NDP government has been the most progressive government historically in North America. The Social Democratic government was elected back in 1944. A lot of progressive people are saying that the gun registry is not the right thing to do; gun control, yes, but gun registry, no. The member across the way should know that if she has been following this debate at all over the last number of years.

I am also happy to say that the Federation of Saskatchewan Indians is challenging this law in the courts. I stand with the first nations people, as I have been doing in committee hearings that are being held now in the Centre Block of the House of Commons.

Government Orders

The widespread point of view is that the gun registry will not be helpful in fighting crime, and that point of view is held by a number of people, including the police.

I have been a member of Parliament for over 30 years and I have never seen such a financial boondoggle in my life as the gun registry. It was supposed to cost \$2 million to implement the program but it has now cost about \$1 billion. No wonder the member leaves the House hanging her head in shame. There has never been a program with cost overruns like I have seen here. The Auditor General has said that and yet we have this kind of motion come before the House today. I want to make it very clear that what is happening today in the House is the wrong way to go.

The bill itself has been split by the Senate, which is also the wrong thing to do. The Senate is not elected. It is not democratic and it is not accountable. I have nothing against any particular individual in the Senate in terms of them as people. Many of them are very hardworking individuals. However in a modern day democracy an unelected appointed body should not have legislative power. What is happening now is a dangerous precedent being set by the Senate and being accepted by the government.

A government bill that was introduced back in October was sent to the Senate. The Senate separated the bill into two parts, one dealing with firearms and the other dealing with cruelty to animals. As I said earlier this morning, the part dealing with the firearms registry is actually a money bill. To accept the fact that the Senate can have this kind of power with a bill originating in the House of Commons dealing with the expenditure of the public's money is a very dangerous precedent to set.

This will come back to haunt the government across the way. The precedent is set now and the same thing will be done in the future. I ask the government at this time, when it is having a leadership race for the renewal of the Liberal Party, should we not be looking at how we can democratize our Canadian institutions? Is there any reason that we should have an unelected chamber with legislative power?

Many years ago when our parliamentary system was formed we accepted from the British the idea of having a bicameral system. It is debatable whether we should have a bicameral system but it was accepted in those days to have a House of Commons, electing the commoners.

• (1235)

We also accepted the British idea that the aristocracy needed to have someone overlooking the commoners. The British have the House of Lords and we have the Senate. We decided the Senate should be appointed by the prime minister and the prime minister could appoint whomever he or she wanted to the Senate. Usually they are friends of the prime minister or members of the prime minister's party; a lot of hacks, flacks and bagmen for that particular party.

On top of that, the Senate has the power to change legislation. It has the power to split a government bill. I believe that is fundamentally wrong.

I wish we had a parliamentary system where members of the government side could get up and speak freely, as the member from

Sarnia has done, on how they feel about the Senate having this type of power and authority.

Canada has the most handcuffed parliamentary system in the world. Even in Britain there are many free votes. The Blair government, when Tony Blair was at the height of his popularity, or Margaret Thatcher at the height of her popularity, on many occasions had government bills that were defeated in the House of Commons but the government did not fall. The bill may have been introduced in a different form later on. However we do not have that kind of freedom and democracy in our political system.

I want to say to the government that it sets a very dangerous precedent to allow the Senate to split a bill. I will put this properly. The Senate has the power to split a bill but the House of Commons has the authority to reject the idea from the Senate and to send it back to the other place. When the government decided not to do that and accepted the fact that the bill was now in two parts, one dealing with firearms and one dealing with cruelty to animals, I think set a very dangerous precedent.

It is not just the firearms part. The Senate has now made amendments to the cruelty to animals part of the bill as well. The Senate has weakened what the House of Commons sent to the Senate. I think that is the wrong thing to do.

Once again I appeal to members across the way to reject what the Senate has sent to us. I ask members to think seriously about reforming our democratic institutions. If we do not do that this place will become more and more irrelevant to more and more Canadians.

Before I sit down I want to say that on the gun registry itself there is widespread opposition to what the federal government is doing. It comes from every political corner of the ideological framework across the country.

As I have said before, when Bill C-68 was introduced and supported in the House of Commons it was opposed by the NDP Governments of Manitoba, Saskatchewan and Yukon. The NDP Governments of Manitoba and Saskatchewan are not co-operating now with the administration of the bill, and I applaud them for doing that.

About two weeks ago I met with Saskatchewan's justice minister, Eric Cline, in Regina, and Saskatchewan's position remains firm. There is no data whatsoever that the registration of firearms will bring down crime or the causes of crime in the country.

We need more money to fight crime. We need to be tougher on criminals and tougher on the causes of crime. I represent the riding of Regina—Qu'Appelle. We have the inner city in my riding with a very high crime rate. The way to bring down the crime rate is to put more money into fighting crime and into putting more police out on the roads. The minister of justice told us that if an extra \$20 million or \$30 million a year could be put in a place such as Saskatchewan in having more police officers out in the communities that crime would go down.

Government Orders

I see in the House today the member for Souris—Moose Mountain who is from Saskatchewan. Even though he is not from Regina I think he is aware that Regina had the highest rate of auto theft of any jurisdiction in North America about two years ago. It was a very unfortunate occurrence. Much of that is in my own riding.

The Province of Saskatchewan, the City of Regina and the police now have a new program to deal with car theft. Car thefts have dropped by a huge percentage. I cannot recall the percentage but over the last year it has been 30%, 40%, 50% or more.

What we can do is tackle crime and tackle the causes of crime. Sometimes the causes of crime have to deal with the fact that people do not have opportunities. They are living in poverty and despair. If we were to drive around part of the inner city in Regina we would see the condition of the housing. We would see the unemployed people. We would hear the stories about the drug trade and the prostitution trade. We would see the looks of despair and helplessness on the faces of many of the people. It is no wonder the crime rate is very high. If we were to put more money into fighting the root cause of crime, Canada would be a better place indeed.

● (1240)

The billion dollars which has been put into the gun registry means that money has been taken away from other things, like more police on the streets. Also in Saskatchewan a program was cancelled in terms of gun safety courses that would have cost only a few tens of thousands of dollars. Those are very worthwhile programs and are very helpful.

The government is fundamentally wrong by accepting the fact that the Senate can split a bill, particularly a money bill, like it has done with the one before us today. It is just wrong for an unelected body to have that kind of legislative power. It makes a mockery out of the parliamentary system.

The government should come to its senses in terms of Bill C-68. The registration is not working. It is opposed by an overwhelming majority of the people in the country and it does not have the cooperation of most of the provinces.

I am proud to say that as a member of the New Democratic Party and social democrat that our two provincial governments are very much opposed to the bill, have always been opposed to it and are not cooperating with the implementation of the bill.

I stand also four-square with the Federation of Saskatchewan Indians and other first nation people in Canada who are challenging this thing in the courts and are hoping to get Bill C-68 pulled out of the legislation in the country. It is in conflict with their treaty and hunting rights, rights that are enshrined in the constitution on behalf of the first nations people.

I invite the member across the way to come to her senses, reflect on what she has said and hopefully oppose the bill before the House.

Mrs. Marlene Jennings (Parliamentary Secretary to the Solicitor General of Canada, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I found it quite interesting to listen to the comments of the member across the way for Regina—Qu'Appelle. He made the statement that the majority of

Canadians did not support the firearm registry nor did they support the gun control program as it now stands. In January 2003 a poll by Environics showed that a majority, or 74%, of Canadians supported the program's elements, including licensing and registration. The company specializes in that. Also, that same survey showed that support for gun control, and this includes the licensing and registering, ranges from 59% in western Canada to 85% in Quebec, my home province, to 78% in Ontario to 74% in Atlantic Canada. What does the member think about that support which was shown by a survey in January?

More to the point, the member also talked about how all the provincial governments were opposed to the firearm registry program and gun control program. Why did he not mention the fact that the Alberta government actually challenged the Firearms Act? It went before the Supreme Court of Canada. All the other provincial governments, and I am not sure about the territorial governments, joined in, including his own provincial government of Manitoba. The Supreme Court in 2000 unanimously concluded that both the licensing and registration were tightly linked to Parliament's goal of enhancing public safety by reducing the misuse of firearms and by keeping firearms out of the hands of those who should not have them.

When the member talked about the opposition by provincial governments, why did he not mention that opposition went all the way to the Supreme Court and that the Supreme Court ruled that licensing and registration were tightly linked to public safety and that was a good thing?

● (1245)

Hon. Lorne Nystrom: Mr. Speaker, I do not know where she was when I was speaking but I did talk about the fact this was challenged by the Alberta government and that legal action was taken. She can look at the record on this. By the way, Regina happens to be in Saskatchewan and not Manitoba. She said that I was from Manitoba.

However I was very proud of the fact that the Saskatchewan government had intervener status in terms of opposing the federal law of the Supreme Court of Canada. I think eight provinces were involved in that, including the province of Manitoba. I think all three territories were involved, or certainly two were. I did make those points and I am very pleased that they were. I am very supportive of the first nations people and their legal fight against Bill C-68.

In terms of public opinion on gun control, put me down as supporting gun control many times in the House of Commons. I have been here for all the debates in the House, except in 1995 when I was not an MP and when Bill C-68 came in. I was here for the firearms acquisition certificate debate and for the debates in the old Trudeau government and Mulroney government. I supported all the gun control bills right on through until we came to registration. Registration is not gun control and that is where I draw the line.

Government Orders

If a poll was done on whether people supported the registration and a billion boondoggle, there would be massive opposition to this. If the member does not believe me, come out to my riding and go house to house. She would be amazed at the people who oppose this, from 85 year old grandmothers to young teenagers. People are universally opposed to the registration. As I read Saskatchewan, my riding and the country, the overall majority of people are opposed to this.

It is unnecessary. Let us put the money into fighting crime, let us put the money into more police officers to put them on the streets and let us not waste all this money on the registry which will not help public safety whatsoever.

I think those were the two questions. Regina is in Saskatchewan, I come from Saskatchewan and I did mention the court cases.

Mr. Stockwell Day (Okanagan—Coquihalla, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, it is not often in the House that one sees the NDP agree with the Canadian Alliance positions, so those are moments which we treasure and savour. On this issue related to the Liberal gun registry disaster, the Liberal member talked about polls.

I think the question that was not asked of citizens was, “Do you support a gun registry system which is proven not to work and which the Auditor General has said is a billion dollar disaster?” If Canadians were asked that question, the response would be overwhelming. Canadians do not support the misuse of their hard earned tax dollars. Canadians do not support legislation which does not work. If that had been the question, we would have seen resounding public support for the Canadian Alliance position and the NDP position.

I also agree with my NDP friend when he talks about the inappropriateness of an unelected body, the Senate, having control over legislation that affects the lives of people. People who control legislation, who are responsible for legislation, need to be accountable. Again, this is no reflection on the people themselves, but the role of a senator does not include accountability to the electorate. That is why it is deficient and needs to be reformed.

We support firearms safety and we support the fact that arms are controlled by the fact that people have to have a certificate to purchase a firearm. However we do not support this billion dollar disaster.

One of the distinctions with the Canadian Alliance position is that we support more police officers on the street. Does the NDP position also accommodate the Alliance position which is that there should be an increase in severity of sentencing for those who commit crimes with firearms?

• (1250)

Hon. Lorne Nystrom: Mr. Speaker, I guess I would have to ask what he means by the increase in severity. I have always believed one has to be tough on crime and tough on the causes of crime. That is what we have to do in our society.

We also have to do restorative justice where we can as well and try to rehabilitate people. I have seen many cases of younger people who have gone into a prison or into a youth centre and if there has been no restorative justice, they have come out more hardened

criminals. That is an extremely important case to make in this debate as well.

We cannot just have a tough penalty and throw away the key for absolutely everybody. We can restore some people and make them a useful citizen of our country. We can give them training, skills and education, then they start paying taxes and so on. That is a very useful thing to do.

It is not just a simple yes or no answer. As I said, we have to be tough on crime and the cause of crime. Also, we have to do whatever we can to rehabilitate people, to retrain them and ensure that they have skills and training in jobs to make a useful contribution to our society.

I have spent a fair amount of time looking at the criminal justice system and it is not a black and white issue in many cases. In many cases the judge has to have a certain amount of flexibility in terms of the punishment that is handed out.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Raymonde Folco (Laval West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise in the House today to discuss the Canadian firearms program in the context of Bill C-10A and specifically to address the public's support and the benefits of this legislation.

Canadians have often indicated that they want—indeed, demand—to live in a fair, peaceful and safe society. Public safety is the prime objective of the Canadian firearms program.

The firearms program is designed to improve public safety by controlling access to firearms and ammunition, encouraging safe use of firearms, controlling specific types of firearms, and giving police officers a valuable tool for their investigations. This program is intended to keep firearms away from those who should not have them, that is, individuals who present a danger to themselves or to society.

I would like to point out that the purpose of the program is not to interfere with the legitimate use of firearms in Canada but rather to promote firearms safety and thus prevent death and injury by firearms and dissuade criminals from using firearms in the commission of crimes.

As the program has been implemented, the Government of Canada has been careful to respect the legitimate interests of hunters, target shooters and others who use firearms for legitimate purposes.

According to a recent Environics poll, a great majority of Canadians support the public safety objectives of the firearms program, including the licensing of gun owners and registration of firearms.

Licensing makes it possible to ensure that firearms owners meet rigorous public safety criteria. The registry makes it possible to link each firearm with its owner, which leads to greater accountability. Safe storage and training in proper handling of firearms are two other important aspects of the program.

Points of Order

In their letters indicating support for the program, citizens from one end of the country to the other are unanimous: public safety comes first.

The program has the support not only of the Canadian public, but also many experts in health and safety, including the Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police, the Canadian Police Association, the Canada Safety Council, and the Canadian Resource Centre for Victims of Crime, to name just a few.

I will give a few examples of organizations that have expressed their support for the firearms program.

For example, Debbie McGray, president of the New Brunswick Nurses Union, wrote the following in a letter on December 13, 2002:

Nurses see the devastating effects of the misuse of firearms every day—however, thanks to the screening process and the requirement for owners to register their firearms, the program has resulted in a considerable decrease in the number of deaths from firearms.

Dr. François Desbiens, Director of Public Health for the Régie régionale de la santé et des services sociaux du Québec, wrote the following on February 21, 2003:

The Canadian firearms program comprises a broad range of concrete measures aimed at decreasing injuries by firearms—with a view to saving lives, avoiding accidental shootings because responsible owners will store their weapons better, protecting spouses in the event of family violence and making it harder for potential suicides to have access to weapons.

Finally, Kathy Belton, Co-Director of the Alberta Centre for Injury Control and Research, made the following observation on December 11, 2002:

Firearms kill more young people in this age group, that is the 15- to 24 year-olds, than cancer, drowning and falls combined. The Canadian firearms program is just beginning, but the figures show that it has already brought about a reduction in the number of deaths and crimes involving firearms.

● (1255)

Clearly the program works and enjoys solid support. The firearms program has delivered good results. Up to this point, several thousands of firearms permits have been denied or revoked by those responsible for public safety.

The Canadian Firearms Centre has received a great many calls to its notification lines, which were set up to allow Canadians to express their public safety concerns with respect to certain persons who possess firearms.

Law enforcement agencies across the country have consulted the online registry data several millions of times since December 1, 1998. All of these efforts help us prevent people who should not have firearms from possessing any. In the end, it saves lives.

It is fairly easy to imagine dangerous situations that the program has already prevented. The purpose of the Canadian Firearms Centre is to make our families and our communities safer.

Through measures contained in Bill C-10A, the government plans on improving client service, reducing costs and increasing transparency, as Canadians have requested.

The bill contains a certain number of initiatives which, if adopted, would assist the government in responding to the concerns expressed by the Auditor General and the public.

One of these measures is to stagger licence renewals in order to avoid a bottleneck every five years. With a steadier volume of work, more effective methods can be used that will make it possible to improve client service and realize significant savings.

Simplifying the formalities for transfers of non-restricted firearms and transfers between businesses will make it possible for the provincial chief firearms officers to concentrate their efforts and their resources on other public safety functions. It will improve service to clients without compromising public safety.

Moreover, by grouping all administrative power in the hands of a commissioner, a more direct linkage is made with the minister responsible, now the Solicitor General. In this way, too, financial and political accountability will be improved.

The annual report mentioned in the bill will now be prepared by the firearms commissioner, who will provide complementary information on the Canadian firearms program and on the reports already presented to Parliament by the government.

The bill fulfills the expectations of the general public and other observers by building upon the strong support the public has already demonstrated for the firearms program.

* * *

● (1300)

[English]

POINTS OF ORDER

BILL C-10

Mr. Roger Gallaway (Sarnia—Lambton, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order related to the motion before the House. I want to ask for your indulgence while I say to you that the motion now before us is null and void and is therefore out of order. In legal parlance it is void *ab initio*. The motion should not be put to the House. The motion asks the House to waive its privileges or rights in this case with the understanding that this waiver cannot be construed as a precedent.

The motion was put on the Order Paper on December 6 in the name of the Minister of Justice, who is also the Attorney General. The motion in the name of the justice minister asks us to do something which cannot be done; it is an impossibility. The Minister of Justice knows that this motion, if it were passed, would be an order of the House. The minister knows that those rights and privileges referred to in the motion are those received and contained in section 18 of the British North America Act. It states in part:

The privileges, immunities, and powers to be held, enjoyed, and exercised by the Senate and by the House of Commons, and by the members thereof respectively, shall be such as are from time to time defined by Act of the Parliament of Canada, but so that the same shall never exceed those at the passing of this Act held, enjoyed, and exercised by the Commons House of Parliament of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland, and by the members thereof:

The minister knows that this is a fundamental part of our constitution and the law of the land. The rights and privileges referred to in the motion are fundamental constitutional matters. It is clear that this cannot be done. Any motion of the House cannot waive any other law.

Points of Order

I will give an example. Let us assume that on March 1, 2003, John Doe, who happens to be a member of the House, was charged with impaired driving under the Criminal Code of Canada. A motion is subsequently brought to the chamber requesting that the House waive the law of impaired driving against John Doe. It is clear we cannot waive the law of impaired driving. The Crown may decide not to proceed to lay charges or proceed in any way against John Doe, but the Crown has not waived the law concerning impaired driving. The law still exists; it still applies. It has not been waived in such case, so choosing not to apply the law is not a waiver of the law. Waiver of the law, in the case of privileges as contained in section 18, would require an express act of Parliament.

I would submit that the motion before us is identical to the example of John Doe just given. The cabinet, by this motion in the name of the Minister of Justice and Attorney General, asks the House to “waive its claims to insist upon such rights and privileges”. The cabinet is asking the House to waive its privileges as against it. It is asking the House to waive section 18 of the British North America Act, the very privileges that we were given as collective members of this House. It is asking us to waive these section 18 privileges. That is an impossibility and therefore the motion is void *ab initio*.

I want to give a second example. John Doe, a member of the House, makes a statement inside the chamber about an individual I will call Bill Black which, if made outside the House, would be actionable in law. A motion is laid before the chamber waiving the privileges for the statements made by John Doe in the chamber and permitting Bill Black to bring a suit arising from the statements of John Doe in the chamber.

The House could not waive the privileges of a member of Parliament by a simple vote of the majority. Such action would make mockery of section 18 of the British North America Act. The majority of members of the chamber cannot strip a member of privileges enjoyed as a member of the House in that individual's capacity by a simple vote of the majority on a resolution or a motion.

This motion purports to do what cannot be done. It purports that the collective privileges given to the chamber under section 18 will be gone. It purports to do what we cannot do in law.

● (1305)

Section 18 is the legislative legal authority to call the executive to account, so by waiving our privileges we live in a system of crown prerogative, that is, government by cabinet. If this motion were to pass and privilege is purportedly waived, I as a member of the House could apply to a court for a declarative order that this motion is *ultra vires*. The powers of this chamber would be gone. In purporting to waive our privileges, nothing would preclude a court from assuming jurisdiction with respect to this motion that has been brought to the chamber in the name of the Minister of Justice.

This chamber and we the members of the chamber would be reduced to no more than a municipal council, an elected assembly, without the powers bestowed by section 18 of the British North America Act. Without section 18 privileges, responsible government is gone.

Finally, I want to refer to a debate which occurred in the Australian parliament in 1985. It has been said about this, and I have read about it, that somehow—

The Deputy Speaker: The subject matter raised of course by the hon. member for Sarnia—Lambton is one that has been before the House on other occasions. Certainly unless there is something very specific to be added, the Chair has heard what it would consider more than satisfactory information about the subject matter. I would undertake to take it under advisement and report back to the House.

If the member has something else to add, I would like some indication as to how much longer it might take, because I have really heard the thrust of his intervention. I turn to the hon. member for Sarnia—Lambton.

Mr. Roger Gallaway: I will be no more than two minutes at most, Mr. Speaker.

I want to refer to the Australian parliament Debates of 1985, because in 1987 the Australian parliament actually dealt with its privileges. It codified them. In 1985 a debate came on about waiving privilege on a particular point. I just want to refer to Odgers because the thought is that because it was codified it does not apply here. This was before it was codified.

I refer to page 1038 of Odgers' sixth edition. It states:

In the course of debate, views were expressed by Senators that the Senate does not have the power to waive privileges. Senator Durack, a former Attorney-General, said:

I agree with Senator Gareth Evans that this Chamber does not have the power to waive privilege. It is a privilege conferred by the application of the English Bill of Rights of 1688 by section 49 of our Constitution. I do not think it is open to one House of the Parliament to waive or alter it. A declaration of both Houses of Parliament or another Act of Parliament would be required to change it.

I would say we are confronted with a similar situation, an identical situation. The motion before us would order that this House waive its privileges, those same privileges received under section 18 of the British North America Act, the cornerstone of our Constitution. They came to the House through the English Bill of Rights of 1688. It is one of the fundamental laws of the country.

For that reason I say to you, Mr. Speaker, that in waiving privilege we cannot do it because it requires an express act of Parliament, of both chambers. In this case to purport to waive privilege is an impossibility and therefore this motion is null and void. It is void *ab initio*.

● (1310)

Hon. Don Boudria (Minister of State and Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I was not previously aware that this issue would come up at this point, although I believe I have responded to something similar a number of weeks back. I will only take a couple of minutes to bring a few issues to the attention of Mr. Speaker today on the issue of privilege.

Government Orders

First, in the Canadian context, a motion virtually identical to this one was ruled on. It was debated in relation to another bill in approximately the late 1980s in the House. I do not have the specific reference. I remember the incident well; I was in the House when the issue occurred at the time regarding another privilege.

We also have before us here an issue that comes from the standing orders that we have before us, where we affirm in one of our standing orders the issue that is before us today. This involves, at one point, a dispute between both Houses. I suppose it has never been resolved in the end, because we have of course a standing order and the other House does not recognize that this standing order could have the effect that we in our House do. That perhaps is an issue that will not be settled today. I do not propose that it come before us at this point, but we have to recognize that it is in a way, I suppose, part of what is at hand.

So we have, then, the issues before the House today, and first, whether this is properly before Parliament. Need I remind the House that we have debated this motion about half a dozen times up to now. Had it been out of order it would have had, I believe, to have been ruled at that time for this motion not to be properly before the House.

As a matter of fact there were interventions many weeks ago about whether or not this motion was properly before the House, not basing it on the same question as today, perhaps, but nevertheless invoking that the motion was not properly before the House. The Speaker ruled that it was properly before the House. From that ruling of Mr. Speaker at the time, then, the logical conclusion is that the issue is properly before the House.

In summary, then, there are three points. First, the issue is properly before the House. Mr. Speaker has already ruled in that regard. Second, regardless of what has been invoked regarding the Australian parliament, we have our own precedent in the House of Commons based on the issue of the late 1980s as we dealt with it at the time and as the Speaker ruled upon it at the time. Third, the House does not recognize that its privileges are breached; it reaffirms, at the same time, its privileges, which we claim we always had and which we also reassert in our standing orders.

The Deputy Speaker: I thank the hon. member for Sarnia—Lambton for the point of order that he raised and of course I thank the Minister of State and Leader of the Government in the House of Commons for his intervention on the same point of order. The Chair will respond without too much delay on the matter over the course of the day.

There was a period remaining of questions and comments, but I believe we will move to resuming debate. The hon. member for South Shore.

* * *

AN ACT TO AMEND THE CRIMINAL CODE (CRUELTY TO ANIMALS AND FIREARMS) AND THE FIREARMS ACT

The House resumed consideration of the motion in relation to the amendments made by the Senate to Bill C-10, an act to amend the Criminal Code (cruelty to animals and firearms) and the Firearms Act, and of the amendment, and of the amendment to the amendment.

Mr. Gerald Keddy (South Shore, PC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to say at the beginning of debate that if you will allow it I would like to share my time with the member for Cumberland—Colchester. I realize that we do not have a lot of time to speak on this subject. It will probably be the last opportunity most of us get to speak directly to the bill. Therefore, it is important that as many members as possible speak to the bill.

I would like to make a couple of points in the time allotted. First, I would like to go back to December 5, 2002, and point out that the member of Parliament for Pictou—Antigonish—Guysborough, the Conservative justice critic, on that day saved Canadians \$72 million. The motion he brought up, which was subsequently passed by all the members of the House, read:

That the Supplementary Estimates (A) be amended by reducing vote 1a under Justice by the amount of \$62,872,916 and vote 5a under Justice by the amount of \$9,109,670 and that the supply motions and the bill to be based thereon altered accordingly.

The motion was passed unanimously by the House of Commons.

Twice I have referenced the fact that the motion was passed unanimously by the House of Commons. Today we have the same government that agreed that the \$72 million should be withdrawn from the estimates, that the long gun registry was totally out of control, while all the opposition parties were in unanimity and the government even supported withdrawing it from the estimates. Yet somehow today we once again are being forced us to vote on this bill that will allow these same players to put that \$72 million back into the gun registry, and to add on to that a total, by conservative estimates, of a minimum of \$100 million a year until 2008. We have \$1 billion spent now and it is 2003. That is \$1.5 billion. It is unbelievable that the government can find a way to support and to continue to support this flawed piece of legislation.

Earlier today I referenced the fact that we have a cattle registry in this country that registers I believe around 28 million animals. Each one of those animals has a serial number and a bar code. We know where they are, who they are sold to and where they are moved to. I think, although I do not have the number right in front of me, that the total cost of that registry for 28 million animals and a lot of information is in the neighbourhood of \$2 million a year. Yet somehow the government has managed to spend \$998 million more registering less than 20% of the total number of cows and bulls registered. It would seem to me that even as mathematically challenged as many of the government members are, they should be able to do the math on this one.

Members stood earlier and asked what we could buy with \$1 billion. The point was made by one of the Alliance members that we could buy 200 MRI machines. Better than that, we could run the MRI machines that we already have 24 hours a day and we could probably do it for the next 10 years with \$1 billion. We could utilize the equipment that we have.

Government Orders

•(1315)

It has been said that \$1 billion would pay the tuition for a full degree program for every university student in Canada. I would expect that would add a lot more to the economy of the country than the expenditure of \$1 billion that is not working and will not work.

When the Solicitor General was speaking today he refused to say that it will be his job to apply the law. He did say that he fully expected police forces in Canada would apply the law. Well, I would hope not. There are a lot of people, not a dozen, not 50, not 200, not thousands, but hundreds of thousands of people who have not complied. Some of them are old ladies of 85 years of age who inherited firearms from a spouse and who have no intention of registering them. Some have, but many have not. I know a number of them personally and they have no intention of registering their firearms.

Does the government intend to enforce the rule of law? If we have laws, I suspect they are supposed to be enforced. Does the government intend to start arresting 85 year old grandmothers? I would hope not, and shame on it if it does. Yet government members are going to vote in support of the bill and they will be voting in support of that law.

There are hundreds of thousands of Canadians who have never broken the law. They do not have so much as an infraction on their driver's licence. They do not have a parking ticket. However they do have unregistered firearms. I personally know dozens of hunters who have told me they have registered one shotgun and one rifle.

What happens at the end of the day? We are forcing into place a law that is wrong-headed and which will end up putting more illegal firearms on the street. Instead of actually controlling guns, the government is encouraging people not to control them. It is encouraging people to get rid of them. Their firearms may be stored safely and may even have firearm acquisition numbers, but instead of registering 12 guns they have only registered two. Can we blame them? There is no trust among Canadians and among gun owners especially that the government will not turn around and use this piece of legislation against them.

We are in a terrible situation. One billion dollars has already been wasted. Another \$500 million at least will be spent in the next five years, and the bill before us encourages misuse and abuse of the system.

I do not know what the government's alternative is here. I do know there is an obvious door open to the government. That door is for the government to admit that the registry has failed. The government should reverse its position on it and give up totally on this ill-founded idea which it has had eight years to put into place and which has cost Canadian taxpayers \$1 billion. It is my belief that is the only door open to the government.

•(1320)

Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the member referred on more than one occasion to wasting \$1 billion. Coming from an area where the gun issue was not as pronounced as it is in some areas of the country, we have to inform ourselves a little more about some of the facts.

With regard to the \$1 billion, I was surprised to find out that the Auditor General had discovered that some 80% of the applications to register firearms in fact were incomplete or incorrect. This was a deliberate action, a protest as it were, by firearms owners. As a consequence, there was a requirement to invest in a lot more human resources to process those applications. The magnitude of that, I understand, was that over \$300 million was spent to correct or to do the human intervention into a process that should have been computerized.

In addition, because of the protest activity that was going on, a substantial amount of money was also spent on advertising. I understand that figure was in excess of \$200 million to make sure that the correct information was in front of Canadians and to encourage Canadians that the registry is important. That was a responsible action.

Also, the Auditor General reported that the \$1 billion was not spent, but it was a projected number to 2005. What had been spent up to the date of the report was only about \$600 million, I am advised, subject to check.

Having said that, I understand that delay and disruption is part of the democratic governing principles. People have a right to protest. However, it reminds me of the kids in Los Angeles who trashed their own community and said "There, take that".

Why is it there would be a protest? Why is it the website was clogged up at the last minute so that people could not register? It was a protest. I think the member should acknowledge that the consequences of that process were the real reason that additional moneys were spent, that money was not lost, but in fact it was caused by those who disagreed with the law.

•(1325)

Mr. Gerald Keddy: Mr. Speaker, there are a couple of points I would like to make on the member's statement. I will leave the one on the protest until last.

First, the program did waste \$1 billion. It had nothing to do with safety and it had little to do with gun control. It was simply one more example of the government using the opportunity to take away any criticism that might have been put on the shoulders of the government about the policies it had undertaken as a fairly new government in 1994.

The Liberals made promises, some of which they kept. One of them was to scrap the helicopters, which has come back to haunt them. Their promise on Pearson airport came back to haunt them. There was also their promise to get rid of the GST which they never intended to keep.

Those were the issues that the gun control bill was brought in on, as well as the issue of free trade that the Liberals were going to scrap. That is the issue. It had nothing to do with gun control.

Most members in the House support gun control. I support gun control and I have no problem in saying that. I do not support the registry. It has wasted \$1 billion.

Government Orders

The member wanted to break it down as \$300 million to catch up on the people who had not registered accurately. Perhaps the forms were too complicated. Did he think of that? Somehow, for 80% of the people who registered, it is their fault but not the fault of the system that did not work.

On the \$200 million in advertising, that was a waste of money. He should be ashamed of himself for even bringing it up. I do not think any member of the government should bring up advertising after the sponsorship program where again, hundreds of millions of dollars were wasted in advertising. One such advertisement we got a photocopy for cost the people of Canada \$500,000. I do not think there ever should be a member of the government who would want to talk about advertising. If \$200 million was spent on advertising the gun registry, I would like to see a forensic audit done on every penny of it.

Mr. Bill Casey (Cumberland—Colchester, PC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to speak to this subject. I want to hit on two issues; one is the effectiveness of the process and the other is the waste that we have heard so much about.

The Solicitor General was up on his feet this morning saying that we have to have an efficient system. He must have used the word efficiency a dozen times but never once did he say effective. One of my beefs with the system is that it is not effective.

There is a person in my riding who registered one rifle. He got five registrations. That may sound like an insignificant issue but the police out there, who the Solicitor General said are counting on the system to help them do their job and protect them, may go to that man's house, call the firearms registry and be told he has five rifles. He does not. He registered one but the registry registered five.

Another man I know registered 18 firearms and got 36 registrations. Another man registered five firearms and he only got two registrations. He is a doctor. He knew how to fill out the forms. He did the best he could. He filled the forms out right and that is what happened.

When we tried to find out what had happened with one of the men I mentioned earlier, we found there were five lines on the form to fill in. He had one rifle. He filled it in five times with exactly the same information on each line and still the firearms registry registered five firearms. Anybody who looked at it could have seen there was a mistake, that he had listed the same gun five times but the system is so ineffective and lacks such credibility that nobody could even understand it.

When I asked the Solicitor General this morning about some of these problems, he agreed. He said that there are bad examples. The minister said the government is trying to personally contact some of these people at the very least to find out what happened to see if it can be corrected.

We as a party have established a website exactly for that. People can contact us or Parliament, and tell us exactly the problems they have had. It is really simple. People can access www.gunregistry.ca and type in their problems and difficulties. They will be given to the Solicitor General and hopefully he will deal with them in the way that he promised in his statement this morning.

In that way we hope to deal with the ineffectiveness of the program which I am sure has ruined the credibility of it so that no police officer could depend on it. If it is not credible, I do not know what good it is in any case. Never mind the money that was wasted on the whole program, if the information is not right, and I know it is not right, the Solicitor General admitted it is not right, then what is the point in having it? Even though some people support it, it is no good if the information is not credible and it is not.

I want to touch on the waste aspect of it as well. The government side often says that we are just complaining, that it is the opposition being the opposition, but it is not only us. It is people, organizations, authorities across the country, provinces and attorneys general. It is everybody.

One for whom I think most of us around here have a great deal of respect is the Auditor General. She is a person for whom I have the utmost respect and I think we are very fortunate to have her in her position. We are very fortunate that she does the job she does.

The Auditor General has said that only 30% of the funds used for the program came through the right system while 70% of the funds came through inappropriate systems, supplementary estimates and other departments. It is incredible that the government could try to hide this. That is exactly the point she was trying to make.

The Department of Justice, in the Auditor General's report, did not provide Parliament with the estimate of all the major additional costs nor did it give us an accounting of the additional cost. The original cost was to be a couple of million dollars and now it is estimated, by the time it is done if it ever gets done, at over a thousand million dollars. It has gone from two million to a thousand million dollars.

I talked to a CEO of a major privately traded company on the plane the other day. He said that if they start a project in that company and there is an overrun of 5%, the project manager has to report back to the board of directors and explain why it is 5% over. If it is 10% over, the project stops. That is in the private sector.

● (1330)

We have a government project which we were told would cost about \$2 million. Now it looks like it will cost a thousand million dollars, and the government runs and hides. The word now is that the government is trying to privatize the process so it can further confuse everybody and avoid answers. Then the government can say that it is privatized and it cannot answer those questions.

The Auditor General says that she was unable to complete her report because of the multitude of discrepancies and shortcomings in the information provided by the Department of Justice. That must make the government feel very proud, to say that the Auditor General could not even do a report because of the inconsistencies, the discrepancies and the shortcomings of its accounting, especially when it knew the whole country was watching this program. It is one of the most controversial issues. It did not even bother to account for the money and it cannot explain where the money went.

Government Orders

The Auditor General, who has proven to be extremely capable, extremely effective and efficient, cannot do an audit on the firearms registry expenses of a thousand million dollars.

It is a shame that we are back at this once again trying to get more money. I want to remind the House that if members wish to register their complaints with the firearms registry, all they have to do is send us an e-mail at www.gunregistry.ca. We will be glad to hear from members and all the problems they have had in registering their guns.

• (1335)

Mr. David Anderson (Cypress Hills—Grasslands, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, it has been interesting to hear a couple of the Progressive Conservative members speak on the issue. Conservatives have never been known for their good sense on financial issues. It is somewhat hypocritical of them to talk about cost overruns, considering how the last P.C. government in Canada handled the finances of the country.

What is really irritating about Bill C-68, which was introduced by the Liberals, is that it was only introduced because the Progressive Conservatives had first committed to a firearms legislation, and on which the Liberals had to up the ante. Therefore, they brought in this onerous Bill C-68, which would never have passed if it were not for Progressive Conservative senators supporting the bill and passing it.

Then we were faced with Bill C-15, which has now mutated into Bill C-10A. Once again we are faced with having to deal with the bill. I guess the only thing more irritating than listening to the Conservatives opposing the bill, after they had supported the bill through the Senate, was to hear one of the government members a few minutes ago talk about how \$600 million was a justifiable expense in this program.

To the member at the other end, what epiphany did members of his party experience that caused them to change their position on this legislation? Was it when the Conservatives realized that their constituents actually opposed the bill or was it when the cost of the bill became too high even for Progressive Conservatives?

Mr. Bill Casey: Mr. Speaker, this is an interesting question. However I will give the member a little history lesson. The Conservatives brought in gun control legislation which dealt with safe storage, registration of non-registered guns and better control, issues relating to transportation and storage and things such as this.

When we were presented as a caucus with a proposal on gun control issues, one of them was registry of firearms. We as a caucus turned that down. We said that, yes, we would take the safe storage, yes, we would take the FAC issue and yes, we would have conditions for the transportation of firearms. However, it was no to long arms registration. We turned that down in the beginning when Bill C-17 was brought in because we did not think it was required and we did not think it would be effective or do the job.

The bureaucrats at the time were advising us to go the gun registry. We chose not to. The Liberals listened to the bureaucrats and adopted the gun registry. That is where we are now, a billion dollars later, a thousand million dollars down the drain because the Liberals did not use any of their own intelligence to deal with this issue.

Mr. John Herron (Fundy—Royal, PC): Mr. Speaker, the last question and the response of the member for Cumberland—Colchester really disseminates the difference between the Canadian Alliance and the Tories on this issue.

The Tories believe we need to have strong firearms legislation to deter the criminal use of firearms. There is nothing wrong with having safe handling provisions itself. We have no trouble saying that we are for gun control, but we are against the long gun registry. We said that from the get go.

The question was when did the epiphany on gun control take place? I will ask the member for Cumberland—Colchester what his perception would be given that the current member for the riding of Calgary Southwest, the leader of the Canadian Alliance, when he represented another Calgary riding voted for Bill C-68 at second reading, which is a point of fact, but reversed his vote at third reading of the bill and ended up voting against the bill. If there has been a flip-flop to speak of, the Canadian Alliance folks might want to look at themselves in the mirror first.

I would like to hear what my hon. friend for Cumberland—Colchester has to say about that.

• (1340)

Mr. Bill Casey: Mr. Speaker, all I can say is we have been totally consistent for more than a decade on the aspects of gun control that we support, and one of those is not the firearms registry. The member referred to has changed positions, as members in that party do from time to time; changing names, changing positions and changing directions but that is their business.

However, we have been very consistent all the way through for about 12 years now on our position on registry of firearms.

Mr. Alan Tonks (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of the Environment, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to rise today to talk about the important changes that are taking place to streamline the firearms program and make it more efficient. Bill C-10A is really all about improving the program and increasing program efficiency.

There has been an attempt to resurrect the whole firearms control act and challenge it. That really is not what is before us today. What is before us today is the streamlining and efficiency of the program, and Canadians are concerned about that. I emphasize that is what is before us because the province of Alberta, when it challenged the right of the government to bring in the legislation, challenged the government on the basis of whether it contributed to public safety. The Supreme Court ruled that registration and licensing were two sides to the same coin when we talk about public safety.

Let us talk about what the bill addresses and that is the matter of streamlining and making the program more efficient.

With that in mind, I want to take advantage of this opportunity to remind Canadians about some of the positive steps the Government of Canada is already taking to improve this important legislation and this program.

Government Orders

The firearms program enhances public safety by controlling access to firearms and ammunition, by deterring their misuse, and controlling specific kinds of firearms. In other words, it addresses the whole culture that Canadians have with respect to firearms and a respect for them.

The program approaches gun safety as a practical manner by registering firearms and licensing their owners. Mandatory safety training helps reduce accidents and reinforces the principles of safe storage. Again, that contributes to that attitude of that culture with respect to firearms.

Since December 1, 1998, the government has issued firearm licences to over 1.9 million individuals. In addition, we have over six million firearms registered and now in the database.

Throughout the implementation process there have been many challenges. Many people waited until after the Supreme Court decision in June 2000 before applying for licences. I have already indicated that decision made it quite clear, that registration and licensing were two sides of the same coin in terms of public safety.

Changes in technology we recognize have contributed to rising costs as have delays in the adoption of Bill C-10A. We cannot ignore this. The government calls upon both sides of the House to expeditiously get on with this improvement of the mechanics of the implementation because it is the costs associated with it that are driving Canadians in the direction of a mistrust in their public institutions.

Nevertheless, the Canadian public has a tangible asset that includes a system of checks and balances, a spousal concern outlet and a database which is already proving its worth and making it very important to frontline officers.

A key date for the firearms program was December 31, 2002. That was the deadline for registration of firearms. On December 27 of last year special measures were announced for firearm owners. These special measures included a grace period for licensed owners who had mailed in their applications but not yet received their certificates in the mail. The grace period was also extended to people who were trying to register their firearms at the last minute but were unable to because of higher than normal call volumes and Internet traffic. These individuals were protected from prosecution provided they submitted a statement of intent to register their firearms before January 1, 2003, and many availed themselves of that in good faith.

● (1345)

While not an extension to the registration deadline, these special measures allowed people more time, in light of increasing demands on the call centre as well as the online application.

Over 70,000 individuals responded and sent in a statement of intent and each individual was been contacted and either provided with a registration form or provided with a link to the online application which was reinstated earlier this year. Canadians are supporting the program. They are doing it by the tens of thousands.

Now we are approaching the end of the grace period for registration and again, for people to avoid finding themselves in the same situation as before the deadline, we are urging people to complete their applications as soon as possible.

Canadians are committed to the principles of the Firearms Act. That is obvious. Public opinion poll after poll demonstrates this deep commitment. Despite the overheated rhetoric from those against gun control, opposition to the Canadian firearms program is neither as broad nor as unanimous as some would have Canadians believe.

The firearms program keeps guns out of the hands of those who may be a danger to themselves or others, enhances safe storage, transport and use, and prevents illegal guns from entering our country, or at least are steps in that direction.

Hon. members may remember that not too long ago a national poll found that the supporters of every political party represented in the House of Commons supported the firearms program.

During the past several months, the government has announced several key initiatives to improve the program and provide better client service across the country.

On February 21 the Minister of Justice, joined by the Solicitor General, tabled an action plan for changes to the firearms program. At that time the Minister of Justice stated:

The plan will streamline management, improve service to legitimate users of firearms, seek stakeholder, parliamentary, and public input, and strengthen accountability and transparency to Parliament and Canadians.

The action plan contains many key areas that will help strengthen the program and make it more transparent. I am pleased to report that the government has made significant progress in the implementation of that action plan.

On April 14 the Canadian Firearms Centre was transferred from the Department of Justice to the Department of the Solicitor General. This is a natural fit to the Solicitor General portfolio, which is focused on enhancing public safety and ensuring national security.

The national weapons enforcement team also has been transferred. It is now a part of National Police Services which is administered by the RCMP. As members may recall, the national weapons enforcement team has been a key player, a key part, in several high profile cases over the past several months.

The action plan also states the government's intention to consolidate the headquarters function to the firearms program in Ottawa. This has already occurred following the appointment of a new CEO who is now accountable to the Solicitor General for the firearms program.

The government has also been committed to improving the total service to the public. I would like to take the opportunity to remind everyone on both sides of the House that firearms owners can access information and assistance through both a 1-800 service and the CFC website.

Government Orders

The CFC call centre is operational 16 hours a day. On average, the call centre receives 4,000 calls per day on a variety of issues. A recently introduced service allows firearms owner to order a registration form using the keypad of their telephones.

Online registration, which was reintroduced earlier this year, is available 24 hours a day free of charge. Online registration is not only beneficial to clients, it is cost efficient and the processing times are greatly reduced. Canadians by the thousands are availing themselves of the further information that they require. Is this not an indicator that they are interested in the role that they can play in contributing to public safety in Canada?

One of the commitments the program has made is to process every accurate and complete registration application in 30 days. This is only one of many new service standards that we will hear about over the next few weeks.

The government is also establishing a program advisory committee of experienced individuals drawn primarily from the private and non-government sectors to provide ongoing advice on program improvement, quality of service and cost effectiveness.

● (1350)

If the issues with respect to public safety are based in the community, then community based responses with advisory committees of this type are the way the government should be proceeding and is proceeding.

The government also proposed legislative changes to the Firearms Act that are designed to improve the efficiency of the program. Bill C-10A is an essential part of that action plan in establishing a more client friendly and efficient system.

One of these measures is the authority to stagger firearms licence renewals which is intended to help avoid a surge of applications in five year cycles. Evening out the workload in such a manner will guarantee and result in more efficient processing, better client service and significant cost savings.

Streamlining the transfer process for non-restricted firearms allows provincial chief firearms officers in the provinces to focus their efforts and resources on other public safety functions. It improves client services without compromising public safety.

As well, the legislation allows for the increased use of Internet and other automated channels for not only the application process but the issuance of documents as well, which is a further service in terms of outreach to those who have firearms, to allow them to expedite their issuance.

Additional changes contained in Bill C-10A would allow foreign visitors to obtain a pre-approved declaration that will help outfitters to better prepare their clients prior to their entry into Canada.

The amendments have also grandfathered additional handguns that were prohibited in 1995. This change is a direct result of consultations with stakeholders and other program partners.

The Canadian firearms program will present an annual report to Parliament that will provide a full account of the program and complement existing government reports to Parliament.

While additional regulations would be required in some cases, these amendments are yet another example of how the firearms program is evolving and meeting the expectations of the Canadian public.

Canadians want strong and sensible gun laws. They have spoken by the tens of thousands on the issue. They also want a commitment from us that we will administer this program in the most efficient manner possible, and that is the subject matter of the bill. It is inspired by the support of Canadians. I am confident we can overcome any challenge and ensure that Canada has an effective and sensible gun control program, which is what Canadians want.

Passage of Bill C-10A is necessary to ensure that will happen. It is in the interest of providing the best possible service to Canadians and, most important, it will contribute to the culture of community safety that Canadians want as a legacy for themselves and for future generations.

Mr. Myron Thompson (Wild Rose, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, I have a quick question because I know many members want to ask questions.

It does not seem that the time will ever come when the Liberals will finally say that we are not talking about gun control. We are simply talking about a gun registration program that will not be effective, will not make the streets safer and has been a real burden on the taxpayers of Canada. We are not talking about anything but the registration. The Auditor General already clearly indicated that the registration aspect of the program is wasting money.

When will the government and the member admit that we are talking about gun registration, not gun control? We all want to make sure that no one loses control of guns. Our argument is that it cannot be done with just gun registration. When will the member admit that?

● (1355)

Mr. Alan Tonks: Mr. Speaker, as I have tried to indicate, Canadians are voting with their feet. They are supporting this program in actual fact. It is not for the government side to tell Canadians what is in their best interest. Canadians have told the government what they want to see happen with respect to gun control. They want to see how the culture will be made more positive, more protective and more accountable.

However, the member is quite right. Canadians want to see gun control in its totality done in a sensible, accountable and cost efficient manner. The issue that is before the House, the subject matter of Bill C-10A, is the administration of the program, not the philosophy. That decision has already been made, not just by the government but has been adjudicated on by the Supreme Court of Canada. Therefore let us get on with it.

Mr. Roy Bailey (Souris—Moose Mountain, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, Canadians are waiting for the statistic, which I doubt Canadians ever received and which the gun registry already has, on how many criminal activities, in which firearms were used, was the firearm a registered firearm.

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The other thing is, as was mentioned this morning, if I have registered guns and I move to a new location, I must then inform the gun registry of my change of address, otherwise it is completely out.

Finally, I do have an air rifle. What is the test for this criminal who has an air rifle that is used about three times a year? When was the last time a criminal offence was committed with an air rifle?

Mr. Alan Tonks: Mr. Speaker, I would like to address the first question. As to the last question, I am not an authority on air rifles or ballistics associated with the ammunition, so I will leave that one.

When a crime is committed using a firearm, whether it is a domestic dispute, an accident or whatever it is, does it really matter whether it is a registered or a non-registered firearm?

Let me tell the House what is relevant. Society takes every step it can to make sure that the gun does not get into hands where there is a propensity or a probability for the gun to be used in the commission of a crime, be it a domestic dispute or anything else. The question should be addressing that. It does not matter. What does matter is the opportunity for law enforcement officers to make a judgment that the gun should not get into that particular situation or those hands where there is the probability or propensity that it could be used in a tragic accident. The gun registry will help to make sure that does not happen.

The Alliance should be supporting that 100%.

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

[*English*]

ECOLOGICAL GIFTS PROGRAM

Mr. Clifford Lincoln (Lac-Saint-Louis, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I draw the attention of the House to a generous donation of ecologically-sensitive land being made by a constituent, Mrs. Ruth Edna Neville, under the federal ecological gifts program.

[*Translation*]

The Neville farm, on the shores of Lake Champlain at Venise-en-Québec, is the ancestral home of the Neville family, several members of which live in my riding.

[*English*]

Although pieces of the original farm, acquired in 1846 by Irish-born Timothy Neville, have been parcelled out over time, 200 acres remain today in Neville family hands, of which 146 acres are being donated to the Nature Conservancy of Canada.

This gift to Canadians is home to soft-shelled turtles, several species of ducks, beaver, muskrat and other otter, and whitetail deer, as well as rare plants which add to the area's importance as an ecological refuge.

[*Translation*]

My congratulations to the Neville family for their vision and generosity and the trouble they have gone to in order to achieve their dream of being able to share this magnificent natural setting with future generations.

• (1400)

[*English*]

MOTHERS AGAINST DRUNK DRIVERS

Mr. Richard Harris (Prince George—Bulkley Valley, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, representatives of Mothers Against Drunk Driving are here in Ottawa today to urge the Minister of Justice to take further action against the serious crime of impaired driving.

They are calling on the minister and all members of Parliament to support the following changes to the Criminal Code of Canada: lower the BAC from 0.08 to 0.05; enhance police enforcement powers; clarify and redefine the existing offences contained in the Criminal Code of Canada; provide tiered sentencing; eliminate conditional sentencing; and expand ignition interlock provisions.

These proposals are both reasonable and necessary in order to send out a strong message to those in our society who choose to drink and drive that their actions are criminal and will simply not be tolerated.

* * *

WORLD ASTHMA DAY

Hon. Hedy Fry (Vancouver Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am an asthmatic, so I am especially pleased to inform the House that today is World Asthma Day and May is National Allergy/Asthma Awareness Month.

Asthma is a chronic respiratory disease, and asthma and allergies are often closely linked. Some 2.2 million Canadians over the age of 11 have asthma, and 8.4 million report that they have allergies. These problems are on the rise. Asthma rates are increasing, alarmingly so, especially among adult women and children. Asthma and allergies can cause daily suffering and, if not controlled, can cause time away from school and work and, in severe cases, can prove fatal.

Health Canada monitors asthma and allergies and is a member of the Canadian Network for Asthma Care. Environment Canada is working to improve the quality of indoor and outdoor air, which is a major contributor to asthma and allergies.

Understanding the nature of these diseases, public education, prevention and early diagnosis and treatment can decrease the severity of the disease. Breathing is not so simple after all, at least not for some of us.

* * *

CANADIAN ASSOCIATION OF RESEARCH LIBRARIES

Hon. Andy Scott (Fredericton, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise today to congratulate John Teskey, of the University of New Brunswick, on his election as vice-president/president elect of the Canadian Association of Research Libraries, or CARL.

Mr. Teskey has been director of libraries at UNB since 1991. He is widely admired in the profession as an innovator in providing electronic information to the teaching and research community that UNB serves.

CARL is the leadership organization of Canadian research librarianship; it is the treasure chest of Canada's intellectual holdings in all disciplines. Its members are the 27 major academic research libraries across Canada, the Library and Archives of Canada, and the Canada Institute for Scientific and Technical Information.

I ask all members to join me in congratulating John Teskey for the considerable honour of his election as president of CARL.

* * *

BLOOD DONORS

Mr. Geoff Regan (Halifax West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to tell my colleagues about a truly tremendous Canadian.

Bedford, Nova Scotia resident, Jim Lord, marked a momentous milestone recently making his 600th blood plasma donation. This dedicated, community-minded volunteer has been making weekly donations to Canadian Blood Services and, before that, the Red Cross for over 30 years.

Mr. Lord says that the inspiring testimonials he has heard from cancer survivors and other recipients of the blood products he has helped to provide, have kept him coming back again and again. There are more than 300,000 Canadians who depend on plasma or similar products to live each year.

I hope colleagues will join with me in congratulating Jim Lord of Bedford and other regular blood donors across Canada for the important role they play in our health care system.

* * *

NATIONAL PALLIATIVE CARE WEEK

Mr. Rob Merrifield (Yellowhead, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, this week is National Palliative Care Week and it is time for Canadians to recognize the hard work and dedication of our health care professionals, caregivers, volunteers, and family members who strive to improve the quality of life for individuals nearing the end of their lives. Palliative care is about dignity, compassion and respect of life, values that all Canadians share.

Providing the best quality of life possible for the critically and terminally ill is an essential part of our nation's overall health care picture. An estimated 160,000 Canadians require end of life care every year. As our nation's population continues to mature, the demand for palliative care will only increase.

On behalf of the Canadian Alliance, I would ask members of the House to please join me in acknowledging the valuable contribution of palliative care professionals, as well as recognizing the contributions of families that provide end of life care for their loved ones.

* * *

BANK OF MONTREAL

Mr. Janko Péric (Cambridge, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, for longer than Canada has been a country BMO Financial Group has played an important role in community reinvestment. The Bank of Montreal is one of our nation's top corporate donors, giving \$21.4 million to more than 2,000 charities and non-profit groups in 2002.

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In my riding of Cambridge, groups like the United Way of Cambridge and North Dumfries, Countryside Camp and Conference Centre Association, Preston High School, and Cambridge Youth Soccer have received generous assistance from BMO Financial Group.

I wish to join all members in thanking the BMO for assisting Canada's regions and for serving as an example of good corporate citizenship to others in the financial sector.

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● (1405)

[*Translation*]

FLUE-CURED TOBACCO FARMERS OF QUEBEC

Mr. Pierre Paquette (Joliette, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the flue-cured tobacco farmers of Quebec, almost all of whom are in the Lanaudière region, are in an increasingly precarious situation. The recent decision of multinational tobacco companies to reduce their orders will cut production by more than half this year.

Many times, we have asked the federal government to help the flue-cured tobacco farmers so they can find a new livelihood, since their future does not look very bright.

Delegates at the last Bloc Québécois convention passed a motion supporting these farmers' demand that the federal government introduce an assistance program.

Last week, representatives of the Department of Agriculture and Agri-Food met with producers. The latter were very disappointed with the outcome.

If the federal government cannot find anything under existing programs, a special assistance program must be established so that these tobacco producers in Quebec can start growing other crops as soon as possible.

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LAVAL BUSINESSES

Ms. Raymonde Folco (Laval West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, on May 1, at the 2003 Dunamis gala, the Laval Chamber of Commerce and Industry highlighted the contributions of Laval businesses.

For the 22nd consecutive year, awards were given out at the event to Laval businesses contributing to the expansion of that city's business sector.

Awards were presented in a number of different categories: young entrepreneurs, women in business, communications, social and cultural animation. There was also an award for research.

I join with the people of Laval once again in highlighting the exceptional contribution of our local businesses to the economic health of our community. Congratulations to all our winners.

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[English]

INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY WEEK

Mr. James Rajotte (Edmonton Southwest, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, this week is Information Technology Week. The Canadian Alliance encourages Canadians to participate in activities across the country in order to learn about new and existing technologies. From an industrial point of view there is a strong connection between innovation, technology and economic growth. We must continue to make prudent investments in research and development in Canada in order to encourage growth in the information technology sector and in science industries in general.

The industry committee recently made recommendations to lift foreign ownership restrictions applicable to telecommunications carriers. This recommendation is just one step that can immediately be taken to boost investment in technology as the telecommunications sector has long been a leader in cutting edge technology.

The Canadian Alliance applauds the continued good work of this sector in Canada. It is our hope that the government can find the courage to make changes to foreign investment rules, as well as to taxation and R and D policies in order to keep the information technology sector healthy in Canada.

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[Translation]

INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY WEEK

Mr. Gérard Binet (Frontenac—Mégantic, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, May 2 to 11, 2003 marks Canada's third annual Information Technology Week. This joint initiative of Industry Canada and the Information Technology Association of Canada provides an opportunity to share achievements and best practices in this field.

During this 10-day event, communities, businesses, employees, teachers and students are encouraged to work together to find innovative ways of showcasing information technology accomplishments.

In a knowledge-based society, people are a country's greatest resource. It is therefore critical to demonstrate the need for partnerships between the private and public sectors in order to make Canada one of the most innovative countries in the world.

* * *

[English]

NATIONAL ELIZABETH FRY WEEK

Ms. Judy Wasylycia-Leis (Winnipeg North Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, this week marks National Elizabeth Fry Week in Canada. It is an occasion for all of us to recognize the work of the Elizabeth Fry Society.

On behalf of my colleagues in the New Democratic Party caucus I want to thank the staff and volunteers of those societies everywhere across Canada for helping to ensure that women are treated humanely in prison and are given the tools they need to get a solid footing in their communities.

This is also a week to take stock and assess the role of the government in this regard. The Auditor General's recent report

shows that the government has a lot of work to do to meet its obligations. Men still have more access to rehabilitation programs. Women are still denied the help they need to rebuild their lives. As many have said, the government still treats women offenders as a correctional afterthought.

Today we call on the government to honour the work of the Elizabeth Fry Society by taking its responsibilities to women offenders seriously, keeping them in the community and out of prison when possible, and adequately preparing them to re-enter their communities.

* * *

● (1410)

[Translation]

NICOLAS MACROZONARIS

Ms. Madeleine Dalphond-Guiral (Laval Centre, BQ): Mr. Speaker, last weekend, a 22-year-old sprinter from Laval, Nicolas Macrozonaris, stunned the track and field world by taking the gold medal in the 100 metres at an international meet in Mexico.

Defying all expectations and despite limited financial means, Nicolas Macrozonaris managed to realize the full potential of his talent by taking the top spot on the podium. The favourite to win the event and current world record holder, American Tim Montgomery, had to settle for the silver medal.

With a time of 10.03 seconds, this young Quebecker joined the ranks of champions and earned international recognition.

We congratulate Nicolas Macrozonaris and wish him a long and successful career; he will continue to surprise us.

Bravo, Nicolas.

* * *

[English]

TORONTO

Ms. Judy Sgro (York West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise today to announce that Toronto is back in business as Canada's most vibrant city. On Friday, and throughout the weekend, hotels, theatres, restaurants, bars and sports facilities were full and busy as Canadians celebrated "Go Out Toronto" night.

I wish to congratulate all those who made it such a success, from local business owners, to cab drivers, bar staff, and everyone who came to support Toronto. I am proud to see everyone working together to bring my city back to the lively and cosmopolitan place that we all know and which is recognized the world over. It is important that Toronto remain as Canada's main economic engine, since whatever happens to Toronto's economy, good or bad, effects all Canadian cities and all Canadians.

Oral Questions

I ask members to join me in a salute with three cheers for Toronto.

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NATIONAL DRINKING WATER STANDARDS

Mr. John Herron (Fundy—Royal, PC): Mr. Speaker, it has been two long years since an overwhelming majority of members of the House supported a Progressive Conservative motion to ensure that Canada has enforceable national drinking water standards. It has been two years since the Liberal government promised to act immediately. Despite the tragedies of Walkerton, North Battleford, and hundreds of boil advisories across the country, the government's response has been lukewarm at best.

Canada is one of the only modern countries in the world without national drinking water standards. Whether it is E. coli, carcinogens or parasites, Canadians have a right to know what is in their drinking water. The attitude of complacency is what led to tragedies like Walkerton.

The Liberal government has had two years to make good on its promise to establish national drinking water standards as expressed by Parliament. Instead the government is sitting on its hands and waiting for another tragedy to strike. Shame on the Liberal government.

* * *

PERTH—MIDDLESEX

Mr. John Reynolds (West Vancouver—Sunshine Coast, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, being tucked away over in the corner must be making the PC members stir crazy. Now they are seeing things in Perth—Middlesex.

The latest figment of their imagination was an alleged ear piece, allegedly worn by the Alliance candidate during a debate through which she allegedly received verbal coaching. This tall tale came from the alleged PC candidate who heard the message from the mother ship through the receivers in his tin foil helmet.

With great glee and dignity, as one would expect, he informed the local media and even the *Toronto Star*, which said it needed to hear the message itself and could not accept hearsay.

We know the truth. The PCs simply could not understand why our candidate, Marian Meinen, could give thoughtful and intelligent answers to difficult questions. Marian Meinen, or any other woman for that matter, does not need coaching to out-think any PC candidate or even any PC member of Parliament, like the member for South Shore.

ORAL QUESTION PERIOD

[English]

FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Mr. Stephen Harper (Leader of the Opposition, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, we have more spectacles of the government flipping and flopping around on international issues. This time it is on continental missile defence.

The former finance minister hints ever so carefully that he might be for it, but the foreign affairs minister said just last December that the system was immoral and illegal. He said, "We have been concerned about terrorist attacks, which everybody recognizes are not likely to be people that get their hands on ballistic missiles".

If the government does not and has not believed missiles are a threat, how can it now be entertaining supporting the intercontinental missile system?

• (1415)

Right Hon. Jean Chrétien (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I will explain to the hon. Leader of the Opposition today, as I did yesterday, that it is an ongoing debate. There were changes when the Americans and the Russians decided to debate it and the abrogation of the ABM treaty by the Americans was a prelude to that possibility.

We were discussing that in the government ministries in February. We decided to postpone the cabinet decision to this time of the year. We had a first discussion this morning and there will be others.

The government faces every problem that it is obliged to face. This one concerns the defence of this country.

Mr. Stephen Harper (Leader of the Opposition, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, there is the problem. Canada should be leading and making its own decisions, not just following the crowd.

Both the Prime Minister and the Deputy Prime Minister cited possible support for this system from Russia and China, just as the Prime Minister cited support on his Iraq position from France.

Why is he allowing countries like Russia and China to dictate Canada's national policy?

Right Hon. Jean Chrétien (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, concerning Iraq, we were the first ones to say a year ago that the precondition was an agreement with the Security Council.

We have debated the possibility of the deployment of armaments around the globe and in the air. It is not the same thing as protecting the continent from missiles that could come from abroad.

It is a different concept from the star wars of President Reagan. It is why we are looking at a Canadian position when the time comes for us to look into that.

Mr. Stephen Harper (Leader of the Opposition, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, Canada does not have a seat at the Security Council and we did not need the position of Russia and China to join NATO and Norad.

This is about protecting Canadian airspace. It is about protecting Canadian sovereignty, about our role in Norad, and about having a voice at the table with the United States.

Why does the government not realize that these kinds of decisions, like continental missile defence, should be taken because they are in Canada's national interest?

Oral Questions

Right Hon. Jean Chrétien (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is amazing that we never have a question from the opposition until we discuss the problem ourselves. We have been debating this matter for a long time.

The opposition is supposed to be very preoccupied about defence. Members opposite have to realize that there was debate within the Liberal Party in order for the government to make the right decision.

* * *

FISHERIES

Mr. Grant Hill (Macleod, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, we will wait for the quotes from the Prime Minister tomorrow.

The federal Liberal government has mismanaged the fishery for years. It is so bad that crab fishermen in New Brunswick are now talking about boycotting the season and the Liberal premier of Newfoundland and Labrador is saying he will try to protect anyone who defies the cod moratorium from legal action.

My question is for the fisheries minister. Since those involved in the industry have obviously lost confidence in his abilities, why does he not start devolving greater powers for the fishery to the provinces?

Hon. Robert Thibault (Minister of Fisheries and Oceans, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would invite the member to go to the Gulf of St. Lawrence and meet with the ministers of fisheries of the five provinces that are involved in the crab fishery and other fisheries there. I challenge him to come up with a solution that is agreeable to all.

We manage the fishery in the best interests of the stocks, which is in the interests of the communities in the long run.

Mr. Grant Hill (Macleod, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, we would be happy to take over the government and have a fishery policy that everybody could support.

[*Translation*]

Our resource management system is fundamentally flawed. The fisheries cannot be properly managed from Kent Street in Ottawa. The fishers of Shippagan, the Magdalen Islands and Placentia Bay must be able to speak up when it comes to their means of livelihood. They certainly could not do any worse than the federal Liberals.

Why is the minister doing nothing positive for the fisheries and why does he not delegate more control over resources to the provinces?

Hon. Robert Thibault (Minister of Fisheries and Oceans, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I can assure the House that the provinces are always consulted, as is the industry. Before announcing the crab fishing plan for the Gulf, we consulted with the industry, the six associations that represent the offshore fishers, the seven or eight organizations that represent inshore fishers, and the five provinces involved, and made a decision that was in the best interest of long-term industry stability and resource protection.

• (1420)

FIRST NATIONS

Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister says that he initiates the government's policies, yet his successor says he will not be implementing them. Because of the leadership race, we are getting mixed signals from the Liberal camp.

Taking the example of the aboriginal issue, will the Prime Minister admit that the federal government is to all intents and purposes paralyzed by the threat of veto by the member for LaSalle—Émard, since the latter, who will very likely be the PM's successor, says he will not be implementing the Governance Act once he is elected?

Right Hon. Jean Chrétien (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, everyone knows that a change of government enables Parliament to change all of the legislation the previous Parliament has enacted.

The Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development has submitted a bill to the House of Commons. It has gone to the committee after first reading, which gives everyone the opportunity to make suggestions before the bill comes back for second reading. This is an unusual process, and one that allows everyone more input.

It is quite possible that future governments may change the legislation that is in place today, as we have done with that of previous governments.

Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, it is a bit more complex than that, because the member for LaSalle—Émard has said he would vote in favour in order to avoid an election, but would not implement it once he was elected.

What is more, 60% of the present PM's cabinet support the member for LaSalle—Émard and are putting their personal ambitions ahead of their ministerial duties, since they are prepared to support someone who is saying, "What you are doing at the present time I will not be implementing, and if you want to be a minister, you had better follow me in this". Does he think this is right?

Right Hon. Jean Chrétien (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, there is a bill before the House, and all members will be voting on it. Having been the Minister of Indian Affairs myself, I am convinced that the time has come to review the act, which has remained virtually unchanged for generations. It is a very difficult undertaking.

I find the Minister of Indian Affairs very courageous to assume his responsibilities and try to provide the best possible government for the first nations people of Canada.

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CANADIAN TELEVISION FUND

Ms. Christiane Gagnon (Québec, BQ): Mr. Speaker, here is one more example of victims of the government's leadership problems: the people who work in television production. At present, they are hostages in the struggle between the Minister of Canadian Heritage, who is making promises to them, and the Minister of Finance, who refuses to listen to them.

Oral Questions

Does the Prime Minister intend to let these people in the television industry remain hostages much longer in the cockfight between the two leadership hopefuls?

Ms. Carole-Marie Allard (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Canadian Heritage, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is true that the Canadian television fund has been remarkably successful since it was created in 1996.

The moneys allocated to the fund have never been permanent and people who work in this field know full well that budgets will vary from year to year.

[*English*]

Never rush a good thing. I think we will find a solution soon and everybody will be happy.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Christiane Gagnon (Québec, BQ): Mr. Speaker, does the Prime Minister realize that the Minister of Canadian Heritage was speaking in the name of the government when she promised to top up the financing of television productions, and that her words thus committed the government?

Can the Prime Minister—who says he is the one in charge and the one who settles disputes—tell us whether or not the government intends to restore television production funding to its previous level?

[*English*]

Ms. Carole-Marie Allard (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Canadian Heritage, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as I said, never rush a good thing.

[*Translation*]

This government speaks with a single voice. Decisions will be made in due course.

* * *

NATIONAL DEFENCE

Mr. Bill Blaikie (Winnipeg—Transcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Right Hon. Prime Minister.

Last year, the Prime Minister said he could not make a decision about star wars because the technology was not ready. The last test had failed. All of the subsequent tests were cancelled.

Is the Prime Minister prepared to tarnish Canada's reputation in order to join a military program that does not work and that is making the world a more dangerous place? Why the flip-flop?

● (1425)

Right Hon. Jean Chrétien (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I explained yesterday that the situation has changed and that this is no longer the star wars program envisioned by former President Reagan. This is a project that is limited to American territory to defend against missile attacks. The United States has already given assurances to Russia and China that the old star wars program is not what is being considered right now. It is a different project having to do with the protection of North America. It is geographically necessary that we take part in discussions, at least, because the—

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

[*English*]

Mr. Bill Blaikie (Winnipeg—Transcona, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister now seems to admit that there is a debate going on, at least in cabinet this morning where the pros and cons were allegedly put before the cabinet.

I ask him, when are the pros and cons going to be put before Parliament? When are we going to see what the government is considering? When is Parliament going to consider this?

Last week the Prime Minister said to me that there is only “a possibility of a discussion and we have not started discussions”. It seems that the discussion has already started. When will the discussion and debate happen here in Parliament so we can have a real decision process?

Right Hon. Jean Chrétien (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we are having a discussion at this very moment. He is asking me a question about it. It is amazing that it is supposed to be a big problem for them and they start to talk about it only when we, the Liberals as usual, are debating the things that are very important for the nation.

I said it is not star wars; it is something different. It is covering the territory of America. We are part of America. It is against missiles. We have not started any discussion with the Americans, but I am happy that we are having a discussion in the House. He can take an opposition day if he wants to have more debate about it.

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FISHERIES

Mr. Gerald Keddy (South Shore, PC): Mr. Speaker, the debate over the New Brunswick crab quota is being fueled by the minister of fisheries' inconsistency. First he said the quota was reduced based on science. Next he said there might be another 4,000 tonnes of additional quota available. Which is it: science or political manipulation?

Hon. Robert Thibault (Minister of Fisheries and Oceans, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the member should know, as the industry certainly does, that we have said from the very beginning and in the last months as we negotiated over a six month period that, should we get a co-management agreement with a good white crab protocol, we could safely increase the quota. We have not changed our opinion. If we can get a co-management agreement, we can have access to additional allocations.

Mr. Gerald Keddy (South Shore, PC): Mr. Speaker, let us try a little closer to home. In 2002, the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans set the total scallop quota for area 29 at 800 tonnes. The minister then granted access to 600 tonnes of area 29 quota to fishermen from his riding, even though their licences restricted them from fishing in area 29.

So again conservation and science are set by the wayside for political favouritism. When is it going to stop?

Oral Questions

Hon. Robert Thibault (Minister of Fisheries and Oceans, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, again the member is obviously wrong. The quota in area 29 was set in accordance with recommendations by science at a very safe level in an emerging fishery and access was given to coastal fishermen as well as the full bay scallop fishermen who have traditionally been fishing in the inshore areas and midshore areas off Nova Scotia.

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NATIONAL DEFENCE

Mr. Leon Benoit (Lakeland, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, the last time this government sent troops to Afghanistan it sent them without proper uniforms. Now we hear that the Canadian contingent in Afghanistan preparing for this summer's mission does not have permission to carry firearms. Because the government failed to get permission from the stabilization force in Afghanistan before sending our troops into danger, German soldiers have been assigned to protect Canadian troops. This is shameful.

If this is true, why are Canadian troops being sent on this mission with no way of protecting themselves? Is it because of the government's incompetence or is it because of its complete disregard for the safety of Canadian troops?

Hon. John McCallum (Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Neither, Mr. Speaker, and I must say the Alliance must really be scraping the bottom of the barrel today.

The fact of the matter is that we are on a reconnaissance trip, the appropriate diplomatic papers have not yet been signed, and so we are protected by the German forces who are in the field right now, this small reconnaissance team. Soon the papers will be signed and I can assure the hon. member in the House that when the time comes in August for our people to be deployed, they will be fully and appropriately and legally armed.

• (1430)

Mr. Leon Benoit (Lakeland, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, the minister thinks it is unimportant that our troops do not have the ability to protect themselves by carrying firearms. This is right in line with what the government has done in committing Canadian troops to this mission without preparing them or giving them tools to do the job.

After committing to a command role that was supposed to start this summer, we now find out from the minister that Canadians will assume command only after six months. Is it not true that the government has asked Germany to bail Canada out of its commitment because the government committed our troops to a mission they simply cannot carry out at this time?

Hon. John McCallum (Minister of National Defence, Lib.): My goodness, Mr. Speaker, the nonsense gets ever more silly by the day.

We committed from the very beginning to a sizable contingent to Afghanistan, some 1,800 soldiers for six months and another 1,800 in the following six months, working with our German allies, as I was discussing last night with my German counterpart in Ottawa. Only yesterday did I announce for the first time that Canada was offering to take command of the mission in the second six month period.

[Translation]

Mr. Claude Bachand (Saint-Jean, BQ): Mr. Speaker, with regard to the missile defence shield, the Minister of National Defence was hoping to get a mandate from cabinet to allow the Canadian army to negotiate the terms of Canada's participation in this U.S. government project.

Since when does the Canadian army negotiate on behalf of the government? Can the minister explain this new way of proceeding?

Hon. John McCallum (Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I must admit that the questions are a bit strange today. The army is not negotiating for the government. The army has never done this and never will. The government has not made any decisions. How could the army negotiate something that the government has not decided yet? The army never negotiates for the government.

Mr. Claude Bachand (Saint-Jean, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I must admit that the Minister of National Defence is also very strange. Yesterday, the Prime Minister said that the situation was changing. The Liberal leadership candidate has said she opposes Canada's taking part in the missile defence shield. The former and current Ministers of Finance are for it. The Minister of National Defence wants to put the army in charge of the negotiations. What is the world coming to?

Does the Prime Minister not consider this matter important enough for the House to vote on it and give the government a clear indication of the position to take with regard to this sensitive matter?

Right Hon. Jean Chrétien (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, there is an opposition day next week; the Bloc Québécois could use that day for a debate in the House of Commons.

Hon. Don Boudria: There is one this week.

Right Hon. Jean Chrétien: There is one this week. They can hold a debate this week. They need only ask the House to debate the matter. They will want to talk about other things when they really could be getting answers.

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[English]

FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Mr. Stockwell Day (Okanagan—Coquihalla, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, it is an interesting situation when the so-called gang of four in Europe, France, Germany, Belgium and Luxembourg, are now planning on opening up headquarters just down the street from NATO as they continue with their plan to divide NATO. The British prime minister has come out clearly in opposition to this plan.

Why is it that our Prime Minister will not speak strongly as being opposed to this division in NATO? Is it because he is supporting the Chirac plan?

Right Hon. Jean Chrétien (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I said in the House last week that I am for a strong, united NATO, but as usual the hon. member did not listen.

Mr. Stockwell Day (Okanagan—Coquihalla, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, he still will not say he opposes France's plan, so no help for Europe.

Let us try Asia. Yesterday the federal Liberals overruled their own members on the foreign affairs committee and all opposition parties by stomping on Taiwan's simple request for observer status at the World Health Organization.

European parliamentarians, U.S. parliamentarians and others recognize this has nothing to do with the one China policy. They have rallied to support Taiwan, but yesterday with the SARS situation still looming, the Liberals slammed the health window shut on Taiwan's face.

Why does the Prime Minister support the Palestinian authority having observer status at the World Health Organization but not Taiwan? Why not support Taiwan?

Hon. Bill Graham (Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as every member in the House knows, this was a procedural matter that came before the House. It was deferred into House business under the leadership of the House leader and I am confident it will be dealt with.

The hon. member knows very well that Taiwan is not a member of the United Nations and cannot have full membership at the WHO. Canada has always supported Taiwan's ability to get the information. The problem here is that Taiwan will get no more help in the world if it is up to these members, because they will not listen to anything and they will not give anybody else a chance to explain anything.

* * *

●(1435)

[Translation]

ST. LAWRENCE WATERWAY

Mr. Mario Laframboise (Argenteuil—Papineau—Mirabel, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the federal government is increasingly withdrawing from maintenance operations in the St. Lawrence waterway. Its tendency to download the costs onto marine carriers is eroding the competitiveness of the St. Lawrence River and jeopardizing the survival of the ports.

Will the Minister of Transport not admit that the federal government's withdrawal is making it practically impossible for ports along the St. Lawrence River to compete with ports such as Halifax and that, ultimately, this strategy is compromising the very existence of St. Lawrence ports?

Hon. David Collette (Minister of Transport, Lib.): Not at all, Mr. Speaker, and I think that our seaways have challenges for the future. We may have to invest or reinvest in seaways, but I think that this government's policy on seaway marketing has been successful.

Mr. Mario Laframboise (Argenteuil—Papineau—Mirabel, BQ): Mr. Speaker, downloading the St. Lawrence maintenance costs to shipowners is tantamount to downloading snow removal and road maintenance costs to truck drivers, with the effect we can imagine.

Oral Questions

Does the minister intend to continue anyway and keep overcharging the shipowners, who may abandon St. Lawrence ports for those on the American east coast, for instance?

[English]

Hon. David Collette (Minister of Transport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, there are a number of challenges facing the St. Lawrence Seaway. It is an aging structure and obviously there has to be some reinvestment, but certainly the commercialization has worked. Costs have come down. There are problems faced by the shipowners. Certainly there are all manner of things that should be explored, including charges that the shipping companies have to bear.

All of these matters are under discussion. I would invite the hon. member to raise his concerns at the transport committee which has a subcommittee studying this very issue.

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AGRICULTURE

Mr. Ted White (North Vancouver, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, amazing but true, cruise ship companies whose food shipments failed to meet the agriculture minister's new labelling requirements "will be required to remove the product immediately from Canada". Well, duh, that is exactly what they want to do and it is exactly what they have been doing for the last 20 Alaska cruise seasons. What would be the point of leaving the food sitting on the dock?

I wonder if the minister realizes that these ridiculous new rules of his have already driven some cruise ships to relocate to Seattle.

[Translation]

Mr. Claude Duplain (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food, Lib.): No, Mr. Speaker. If we look at all meat products for human consumption in every area of federal responsibility, and cruise ships in particular, these products must comply with food inspection regulations. That is in the public interest.

[English]

Mr. Ted White (North Vancouver, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, cruise lines will have to pay \$68 plus GST for the minister's inspectors to make one of two decisions: either the food is labelled correctly and it can leave Canada; or the food is labelled incorrectly and it must leave Canada. If the minister cannot see the folly of this ridiculous situation, he needs to visit Vancouver and watch the cruise ships come and go for awhile, that is if there are any left.

I ask again, when is the minister going to put a stop to this ridiculous and unnecessary bureaucratic nonsense from his department?

[Translation]

Mr. Claude Duplain (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food, Lib.): It is a matter of food safety, Mr. Speaker. I think that all foods imported into Canada must be inspected before they are consumed by the public.

Oral Questions

[English]

CITIZENSHIP AND IMMIGRATION

Mr. Janko Péric (Cambridge, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration.

A few weeks ago, the minister toured the Wellington detention centre with the member for Guelph—Wellington and myself. Can the minister tell us how negotiations with the province are progressing to find space to house those citizens posing a security risk?

Hon. Denis Coderre (Minister of Citizenship and Immigration, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague from Cambridge for the question. Like he mentioned, we had the opportunity with our colleague from Guelph—Wellington to visit the facilities of the Wellington centre.

We are still waiting for the provincial government to show us clearly that it does not want to lease us that facility. A few months ago we had a deal and at the last minute it failed. We believe that for the sake of our own policy we need to do something. If the minister of public security from Ontario is serious when he talks about detention, he should be on side.

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● (1440)

ARTS AND CULTURE

Ms. Wendy Lill (Dartmouth, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Finance's last budget cut \$25 million from Canadian TV production while boosting credits for American programs. This is the Canadian Alliance approach to culture and it has put the future of *This Hour Has 22 Minutes*, *The Red Green Show* and the *The 11th Hour* on hold.

Over 2,000 good paying jobs from coast to coast are now at risk and companies are facing bankruptcy but the finance minister is only offering duct tape for this season.

Will the minister come up with \$25 million for the CTF today, or will he continue to abandon Canadian TV to the American market?

Ms. Carole-Marie Allard (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Canadian Heritage, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Canadian television fund was created to enhance production in Canada and it did. We will certainly be happy to announce a solution in order to promote production in Canada.

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HEALTH

Mr. Svend Robinson (Burnaby—Douglas, NDP): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Prime Minister.

Roy Romanow described the health council that was promised by the first ministers in their recent health accord as the "heart and soul of health care reform". Now that the council has been delayed to the end of this month or possibly even later, will the Prime Minister assure Canadians that the council will be fully independent of governments, that it will be a public watchdog able to monitor and expose the destructive impact of privatization on health care delivery and will he ensure that it is chaired by a passionate advocate of

public health care, not a privatizer like Frank McKenna or Michael Wilson?

Hon. Anne McLellan (Minister of Health, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, obviously the health council was an important part of the accountability framework set out in the health accord entered into by the first ministers in February. In fact, the first ministers left it to health ministers to clarify the mandate of the health council and to move forward with the appointment of a chair and members.

I can assure the hon. member that I understand, as do all my provincial and territorial colleagues, the importance of this council to Canadians in ensuring that they know where their tax dollars are spent and whether they are getting better health outcomes for those tax dollars.

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FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Right Hon. Joe Clark (Calgary Centre, PC): Mr. Speaker, I have some simple questions on missile defence for the Prime Minister.

Has Canada received a formal proposal from the United States? Is there a deadline? Before committing the Canadian people, will he tell Canadians precisely what the American proposal is? Will ministers of his government be free to disagree in public with the government's decision and still stay in cabinet?

Right Hon. Jean Chrétien (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have to divide that question by five. The first answer is no, so I do not have to reply to the others.

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HEALTH

Right Hon. Joe Clark (Calgary Centre, PC): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Health.

Twenty-five health ministers from across Europe met in Brussels today to discuss containment of the SARS virus in Europe. Of Europe's allies, Canada has had the most direct and relevant experience with SARS. Was the Minister of Health invited personally to join her colleague health ministers in Brussels and if she was not invited originally, why did she not take the initiative to inform personally her colleague health ministers of the lessons that Canada learned?

Hon. Anne McLellan (Minister of Health, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, in fact we share what we have learned through the WHO. I think the WHO will say that we are one of not only the charter members of the WHO but one of the members most committed to the work it does, which includes surveillance and dissemination of information and research.

I am well aware of the meeting of European health ministers. It is important that the European Union health ministers got together and talked about how they might be able to share strategies in relation to the European Union to help control and contain this disease.

GUN CONTROL

Mr. Garry Breitkreuz (Yorkton—Melville, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, the justice minister gave the Coalition for Gun Control \$380,000 to promote the anti-gun agenda at the same time that he is starving programs in his own department. The minister has just cut \$65,000 from the firearms safety training programs in Saskatchewan.

Will the minister please explain how he can justify funding the Coalition for Gun Control while at the same time reducing funding to firearms safety training programs?

• (1445)

Hon. Wayne Easter (Solicitor General of Canada, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the whole purpose of the gun control legislation and in fact the discussion we had this morning is to make Canadian streets safer. That is what we intend to do. That is why we are bringing in Bill C-10A, to create greater efficiencies in the system so that we can do the proper training and at the end of the day have safer streets for all our people.

Mr. Garry Breitkreuz (Yorkton—Melville, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, it seems very strange to me that it would make the streets safer by reducing firearms safety training programs.

The minister is unable to produce a shred of evidence that banning hundreds of thousands of guns owned by law-abiding Canadians has any effect whatsoever at reducing the criminal use of firearms.

Will the minister please tell us today which guns he is going to ban and also important, is he going to fully compensate the gun owners for the loss in value of their property?

Hon. Wayne Easter (Solicitor General of Canada, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, obviously in the discussion earlier this morning the member for Yorkton—Melville was not listening. He does not want to listen. He does not want to hear the good news stories.

I outlined a couple of examples in this morning's discussion from NWEST in terms of where the gun registry in fact helped them find illegal weapons and keep our streets safer.

The member for Yorkton—Melville opposite does not want to admit there are some good news stories out there as a result of the gun control program.

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[Translation]

FREE TRADE AREA OF THE AMERICAS

Ms. Francine Lalonde (Mercier, BQ): Mr. Speaker, despite the fact that FTAA negotiations are making some progress, the Secretary General of the Organization of American States is pessimistic, given that the negotiations are tied to a successful outcome at the WTO.

Can the Minister of Foreign Affairs give us a progress report, and tell us whether he shares the Secretary General's concerns?

Hon. Bill Graham (Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, these negotiations are making progress and, naturally, everything is connected. The FTAA is connected to the WTO, to the OAS. Canada is concerned with the creation in the Americas of a system not only of justice and social solidarity, but also of

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international trade that will benefit all the people of South and North America.

Ms. Francine Lalonde (Mercier, BQ): Mr. Speaker, as the minister is well aware, the Bloc Quebecois wants to see a social development fund created to cushion the blow some countries may experience when the FTAA is implemented. We are not alone in this; it is an opinion shared by a number of the stakeholders, Mexican President Vicente Fox among them.

Will the minister acknowledge that the lack of such a social development fund accounts in large part for the resistance of certain Latin American countries to the FTAA?

Hon. Bill Graham (Minister of Foreign Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is obvious that our goal, and the goal of all the countries, is to have a trade regime that will contribute to prosperity and thus to social justice in all of the countries.

The creation of a development fund is one thing that ought to be discussed, but we do have several major banks for this already, including the Bank for the Americas and the World Bank. The Canadian government believes that we now have the tools in place to help the developing countries.

As I have said, we are going to continue to work with these countries for prosperity and social justice throughout the Americas.

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[English]

FISHERIES AND OCEANS

Mrs. Betty Hinton (Kamloops, Thompson and Highland Valleys, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans has been sailing some rough water lately. Although he is trying to hide it, a new issue is quietly emerging. Users of inland waterways deemed uncharted are being abandoned by Liberals and put in peril.

The minister's intent is that the charting and marking of inland waterways no longer be a federal responsibility. Why are the Liberals ignoring the threat this poses to recreational sailors and the liability factor faced by municipal and regional governments?

Hon. Robert Thibault (Minister of Fisheries and Oceans, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the House and the member will know that we are constantly evaluating our services to see that they are current, to ensure that we are using our resources appropriately.

Some waterways are no longer used commercially by a wide variety of people or there are single users. We attempt in those cases to divest them to the local communities or to other interests prior to removing the buoys.

• (1450)

Mrs. Betty Hinton (Kamloops, Thompson and Highland Valleys, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, this is not a case of new law. It is a case of convenient interpretation of existing legislation. This was a deliberate Liberal choice. The minister knows those inland waterways have been uncharted for many years under the Liberal watch.

Oral Questions

How can the minister demand that municipal or regional governments assume federal responsibilities and meet higher standards than those that were in place when the work was done by his department?

Hon. Robert Thibault (Minister of Fisheries and Oceans, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we make no demands on local governments.

Where we decide that our services are no longer required, where it is the best investment of Canadian resources for public goods and services and we choose to withdraw the services for those reasons, we first offer all those assets to the community. That is what we are doing in this case.

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THE ENVIRONMENT

Hon. Charles Caccia (Davenport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of Finance. The 2003 budget improves tax benefits and expense provisions for small business owners and their employees when using automobiles for work related purposes.

In view of the government's Kyoto commitment, could the minister indicate when a budgetary measure will be introduced to extend similar benefits to small business owners and employees using public transit?

Hon. John Manley (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, first, I would observe of course that we all know in the House of the hon. member's firm commitment to sustainable development, a cleaner environment and public transit in principle.

I would say though that this kind of measure was considered by the finance committee over the last year. It was found that what we were really trying to do was promote incremental use of public transit and the best way to do that was to flow funds to expand the availability of public transit. That is why the government introduced a \$435 million offer to the Toronto region to improve public transit and make it more available to users.

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant (Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, Ontario along with France, Spain and Japan are the four international sites being considered for the \$12 billion international thermonuclear experimental reactor project. The goal of the project is to develop fusion as a sustainable clean energy source for the future.

The province of Ontario has committed \$300 million to the project and is willing to fund more to win the bid.

Does the federal government plan to make a financial commitment to the ITER project regardless of whether we get the project?

Hon. Don Boudria (Minister of State and Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I know the hon. Minister of Natural Resources has been examining this issue together with our cabinet colleagues. Obviously no announcement has been forthcoming yet. We have had excellent representation made by a large number of Liberal MPs. Of course, that does not shock us because they always make excellent representations to all of us sitting around the cabinet table.

Mrs. Cheryl Gallant (Renfrew—Nipissing—Pembroke, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, this thermonuclear project is an

international collaboration between the European Union, Japan, China, the United States, the Russian Federation and Canada.

Does the federal government plan on making a monetary commitment to this project regardless of whether the bid is awarded to Canada?

Hon. Don Boudria (Minister of State and Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this is in fact just an elaboration of the previous question. The hon. Minister of Natural Resources, as I indicated previously, has received representations from a number of colleagues in the House of Commons about this project. It is indeed a very big priority for members on this side of the House.

I take the hon. member's point now as representation. We are finally glad to see the Alliance or at least one member who seems to also support this initiative, supported by countless Liberals.

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[*Translation*]

RAILWAY TRANSPORTATION

Mr. Yves Rocheleau (Trois-Rivières, BQ): Mr. Speaker, as of today, nearly 1,500 citizens and over 40 organizations in the Mauricie, including a good number from the riding of Saint-Maurice, have publicly supported the creation of a high-speed train line between Quebec City and Montreal, with a stop in Trois-Rivières.

My question is this: since the cabinet committee on economic union recently recommended that this high-speed train project be brought forward, does the Prime Minister intend to take advantage of this opportunity to leave his region with a tangible legacy, and could he tell us if he might accept its findings?

● (1455)

Hon. David Collenette (Minister of Transport, Lib.): Yes, Mr. Speaker, we have indeed studied the possibility of a high-speed link between Quebec City and Windsor. I hope to be able to make a statement on this subject very soon.

[*English*]

The Speaker: Order, please. There seems to be an unusual amount of noise in the chamber for a Tuesday. I know many hon. members are trying to help others with their questions or answers as the case may be, but sometimes there are so many members helping that it is hard to hear the person who has the floor.

I am not accusing any one side of being unanimous in its efforts to help, but the right hon. member for Calgary Centre now has the floor and we have to be able to hear the question.

NATIONAL DEFENCE

Right Hon. Joe Clark (Calgary Centre, PC): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister has just said that Canada has received no proposal on missile defence from the United States. What then is cabinet discussing? The foreign minister says that there will be a decision next week. A decision on what?

Right Hon. Jean Chrétien (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, just talk to the Americans.

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GOVERNMENT PROGRAMS

Mr. Paul Forseth (New Westminster—Coquitlam—Burnaby, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the President of the Treasury Board. The last budget promised up to a billion dollars of reallocation from low priority program areas to more valued ones like cleaning up their mistakes. What specific examples can be cited of this so-called reallocation program where any money has ever been taken from a minister and given to another?

Hon. Lucienne Robillard (President of the Treasury Board, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the reallocation exercise is about making choices about priorities. It is about good government.

[Translation]

We have asked the ministers and their departments to identify programs further down the priority scale so that we can reduce or eliminate them and concentrate on programs of more importance to Canadians. Treasury Board is analyzing the proposals and we will soon be in a position to make our decisions public.

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MICROBREWERIES

Mr. Paul Crête (Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup—Témiscouata—Les Basques, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the microbreweries are dismayed by the Competition Bureau's decision to stop its investigation of the major breweries, despite acknowledging that if the major breweries continue their actions, this could hinder free competition.

Since, by law, the Minister of Industry has all the authority needed to act, does he intend to order the competition commissioner to reopen his investigation in the very near future so as to ensure the survival of the microbreweries?

• (1500)

Hon. Allan Rock (Minister of Industry, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Competition Bureau concluded, after an investigation, that currently, the actions do not violate the law, and it is prepared to accept new information. If the hon. member has any information, I invite him to present it to the Competition Bureau.

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[English]

ABORIGINAL AFFAIRS

Ms. Judy Wasylycia-Leis (Winnipeg North Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, it must be embarrassing for the Prime Minister, preparing to leave office, to have the United Nations special envoy in Canada commenting on deplorable conditions on reserves right here in the country. It must be embarrassing to have the United Nations criticize

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Canada for its failure to uphold the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women.

Will the Prime Minister use the next few months to do what he should have been doing over the past decade, and put Canada back on the map as a beacon of equality and respect for human rights?

Hon. Robert Nault (Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it would be helpful if the NDP would join with us in working toward improving the legislative structure and the institutional structure of first nations. That would be a good start.

Second, in the last budget of the Minister of Finance the government put almost half a billion dollars a year in new money into aboriginal communities and their issues. That will go a long way toward improving the lives of aboriginal people.

* * *

FISHERIES

Mr. Norman Doyle (St. John's East, PC): Mr. Speaker, since the closure of the Newfoundland and Labrador fishery, the Premier of Newfoundland and Labrador has said that he will encourage local fishermen to ignore the moratorium on the northern cod. He said that the Newfoundland and Labrador government will not assist the federal government in any prosecutions if fishing continues.

Rather than a violent confrontation on the issue, will the minister now agree to sit down again with the various stakeholders in the Newfoundland and Labrador fishery with a view to reaching a mutually beneficial agreement?

Hon. Robert Thibault (Minister of Fisheries and Oceans, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I know these are very difficult times in Newfoundland and Labrador and I know it is very difficult for the premier and for all his cabinet ministers.

The member will recognize that we made this decision in the best interests of the stocks and in the best interests of the communities of Newfoundland and Labrador for the long term. Fishing these resources illegally will not serve any good purpose. It will reduce the resource.

They have asked us to do increased scientific work. They would not want us to invest our resources in protection rather than conservation.

* * *

PRESENCE IN GALLERY

The Speaker: We have a number of important visitors in the House today.

I draw the attention of hon. members to the presence in the gallery of the Right Hon. Lord Robertson, Secretary General of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear.

The Speaker: I also draw the attention of hon. members to the presence in the gallery of His Excellency Carlos Frederico Ruckauf, Minister of Foreign Affairs, International Trade and Worship of the Republic of Argentina.

Government Orders

Some hon. members: Hear, hear.

The Speaker: I also draw the attention of hon. members to the presence in the gallery of the Honourable Anna Magreth Abdallah, Minister of Health of the United Republic of Tanzania.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[English]

PARLIAMENT OF CANADA ACT

The House resumed from May 2 consideration of the motion

The Speaker: It being 3:02 p.m., the House will now proceed to the taking of the deferred recorded division on the referral to committee before second reading of Bill C-34.

Call in the members.

• (1510)

(The House divided on the motion, which was agreed to on the following division:)

(Division No. 155)

YEAS

Members

Adams	Alcock
Allard	Anderson (Victoria)
Assad	Assadourian
Augustine	Bachand (Saint-Jean)
Bagnell	Barnes (London West)
Barnes (Gander—Grand Falls)	Beaumier
Bélanger	Bellemare
Bennett	Bertrand
Bigras	Binet
Blaikie	Blondin-Andrew
Bonin	Bonwick
Borotsik	Boudria
Bourgeois	Bradshaw
Brown	Bryden
Bulte	Byrne
Caccia	Calder
Caplan	Cardin
Carroll	Casey
Castonguay	Catterall
Charbonneau	Chrétien
Clark	Collenette
Comuzzi	Cotler
Crête	Cullen
Cuzner	Dalphond-Guiral
Davies	Desjarlais
Desrochers	DeVillers
Dion	Discepolo
Doyle	Drouin
Duceppe	Duplain
Easter	Eggleton
Farrah	Finlay
Frulla	Fry
Gagnon (Québec)	Gagnon (Lac-Saint-Jean—Saguenay)
Galloway	Gaudet
Gauthier	Godfrey
Goodale	Graham
Guay	Guimond
Harvard	Harvey
Herron	Hubbard
Ianno	Jackson
Jennings	Jordan
Karetak-Lindell	Keddy (South Shore)
Keyes	Knutson
Kraft Sloan	Laframboise

Lalonde	Lastewka
Lebel	LeBlanc
Lee	Leung
Lill	Lincoln
Longfield	Loubier
MacAulay	Macklin
Mahoney	Malhi
Maloney	Manley
Marceau	Marcil
Marleau	Martin (LaSalle—Émard)
Martin (Winnipeg Centre)	Masse
McCallum	McGuire
McKay (Scarborough East)	McLellan
McTeague	Ménard
Mills (Toronto—Danforth)	Minna
Mitchell	Murphy
Myers	Nault
Neville	Nystrom
O'Brien (Labrador)	O'Brien (London—Fanshawe)
O'Reilly	Pacetti
Pagtakhan	Paquette
Paradis	Patry
Péric	Peschisolido
Peterson	Picard (Drummond)
Pickard (Chatham—Kent Essex)	Pillitteri
Plamondon	Pratt
Price	Proctor
Proulx	Provenzano
Redman	Reed (Halton)
Regan	Robillard
Robinson	Rock
Saada	Sauvageau
Savoy	Scott
Sgro	Shepherd
Speller	St-Hilaire
St-Jacques	St-Julien
St. Denis	Steckle
Szabo	Telegdi
Thibault (West Nova)	Thibeault (Saint-Lambert)
Tirabassi	Tonks
Torsney	Ur
Valeri	Volpe
Wasylycia-Leis	Whelan
Wilfert — 175	

NAYS

Members

Ablonczy
Bailey
Breitkreuz
Casson
Day
Gallant
Gouk
Harper
Hill (Prince George—Peace River)
Hinton
Johnston
Lunney (Nanaimo—Alberni)
Merrifield
Moore
Pallister
Reid (Lanark—Carleton)
Ritz
Skelton
Spencer
Strahl
Thompson (Wild Rose)
Vellacott
White (Langley—Abbotsford)
Yelich — 46

PAIRED

Members

Bergeron
Coderre
Fournier
Girard-Bujold
Kilgour (Edmonton Southeast)
Martin (LaSalle—Émard)
McCormick

Government Orders

Perron
Roy
Stewart

Rocheleau
Simard
Tremblay— 20

The Speaker: I declare the motion carried. Accordingly the bill stands referred to the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs.

(Motion agreed to and bill referred to a committee)

Mr. Joe Comuzzi: Mr. Speaker, would you please seek consent to add my name to those who voted in favour?

The Speaker: Is it agreed to allow the hon. member's name to be recorded with the yeas?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

* * *

CANADIAN ENVIRONMENTAL ASSESSMENT ACT

The House resumed from May 5 consideration of the motion that Bill C-9, an act to amend the Canadian Environmental Assessment Act, be read the third time and passed.

The Speaker: The House will now proceed to the taking of the deferred recorded division on the motion at third reading stage of Bill C-9.

Ms. Marlene Catterall: Mr. Speaker, I believe you would find consent in the House that those who voted on the previous motion be recorded as voting on the motion now before the House with the Liberal members voting yes.

[*Translation*]

The Speaker: Is there unanimous consent to proceed in this fashion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

[*English*]

Mr. Dale Johnston: Mr. Speaker, Canadian Alliance members will be voting yea on this motion.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Michel Guimond: Mr. Speaker, members of the Bloc Québécois will vote against this motion.

Hon. Lorne Nystrom: Mr. Speaker, members of the New Democratic Party will vote against this motion.

[*English*]

Mr. Rick Borotsik: Mr. Speaker, members of the Progressive Conservative Party will vote no to this motion.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Ghislain Lebel: Mr. Speaker, I will vote against this motion.

• (1515)

(The House divided on the motion, which was agreed to on the following division:)

(*Division No. 156*)

YEAS

Members

Abbott
Adams
Allard

Ablonczy
Alcock
Anderson (Victoria)

Anderson (Cypress Hills—Grasslands)
Assadourian
Bagnell
Barnes (London West)
Bélanger
Bennett
Bertrand
Blondin-Andrew
Bonwick
Bradshaw
Brown
Bulte
Caccia
Calder
Carroll
Castonguay
Charbonneau
Chrétien
Comuzzi
Cullen
Day
Dion
Drouin
Easter
Farrah
Forsyth
Fry
Galloway
Goldring
Gouk
Grewal
Harris
Harvey
Hill (Prince George—Peace River)
Hubbard
Jackson
Jennings
Jordan
Kenney (Calgary Southeast)
Knutson
Lastewka
Lee
Lincoln
Lunney (Nanaimo—Alberni)
Macklin
Malhi
Manley
Marleau
McCallum
McKay (Scarborough East)
McTeague
Merrifield
Mills (Toronto—Danforth)
Mitchell
Murphy
Nault
O'Brien (London—Fanshawe)
O'Reilly
Pacetti
Pallister
Patry
Pescholido
Pickard (Chatham—Kent Essex)
Pratt
Proulx
Rajotte
Reed (Halton)
Reid (Lanark—Carleton)
Ritz
Rock
Savoy
Scott
Shepherd
Solberg
Spencer
St-Julien
Steckle
Szabo
Thibault (West Nova)
Thompson (Wild Rose)
Toews
Torsney
Valeri
Volpe

Assad
Augustine
Bailey
Beaumier
Bellemare
Benoit
Binet
Bonin
Boudria
Breitkreuz
Bryden
Byrne
Cadman
Caplan
Casson
Catterall
Chatters
Collenette
Cotler
Cuzner
DeVillers
Discepola
Duplain
Eggleton
Finlay
Frulla
Gallant
Godfrey
Goodale
Graham
Harper
Harvard
Hill (MacLeod)
Hinton
Ianno
Jaffer
Johnston
Karetak-Lindell
Keys
Kraft Sloan
LeBlanc
Leung
Longfield
MacAulay
Mahoney
Maloney
Marcil
Martin (LaSalle—Émard)
McGuire
McLellan
Meredith
Mills (Red Deer)
Minna
Moore
Myers
Neville
O'Brien (Labrador)
Obhrai
Pagtakhan
Paradis
Péric
Peterson
Pillitteri
Price
Provenzano
Redman
Regan
Reynolds
Robillard
Saada
Schmidt
Sgro
Skelton
Speller
St-Jacques
St. Denis
Strahl
Telegdi
Thibeault (Saint-Lambert)
Tirabassi
Tonks
Ur
Vellacott
Whelan

Government Orders

White (Langley—Abbotsford)
Wilfert
Yelich— 179

White (North Vancouver)
Williams

NAYS

Members

Bachand (Saint-Jean)
Bigras
Borotsik
Cardin
Clark
Dalphond-Guiral
Desjarlais
Doyle
Gagnon (Québec)
Gaudet
Guay
Herron
Laframboise
Lebel
Loubier
Martin (Winnipeg Centre)
Ménard
Paquette
Plamondon
Robinson
St-Hilaire

Barnes (Gander—Grand Falls)
Blaikie
Bourgeois
Casey
Crête
Davies
Desrochers
Duceppe
Gagnon (Lac-Saint-Jean—Saguenay)
Gauthier
Guimond
Keddy (South Shore)
Lalonde
Lill
Marceau
Masse
Nystrom
Picard (Drummond)
Proctor
Sauvageau
Wasylycia-Leis— 42

PAIRED

Members

Asselin
Cauchon
Coppes
Gagnon (Champlain)
Grose
Lancôt
Matthews
Perron
Roy
Stewart

Bergeron
Coderre
Fournier
Girard-Bujold
Kilgour (Edmonton Southeast)
Martin (LaSalle—Émard)
McCormick
Rocheleau
Simard
Tremblay— 20

The Speaker: I declare the motion carried.

[*English*]

(Bill read the third time and passed)

I wish to inform the House that because of the deferred recorded divisions, government orders will be extended by another 13 minutes for a total of 43 minutes.

* * *

AN ACT TO AMEND THE CRIMINAL CODE (CRUELTY TO ANIMALS AND FIREARMS) AND THE FIREARMS ACT

The House resumed consideration of the motion in relation to the amendments made by the Senate to Bill C-10, an act to amend the Criminal Code (cruelty to animals and firearms) and the Firearms Act, and of the amendment, and of the amendment to the amendment.

Mr. Gurmant Grewal (Surrey Central, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, I rise on behalf of the constituents of Surrey Central to participate in the debate on Bill C-10A. The bill seeks to amend the Firearms Act. Notably, the bill would stagger firearms licence renewals to avoid a surge of applications in five year cycles. It would simplify the requirements for licence renewals and it would create a commissioner to oversee the program.

We, the members of the official opposition, disagree with the passage of the bill.

The member for Yorkton—Melville has worked very hard and for a very long time on this issue. He has done an excellent job of researching the issue, educating Canadians and holding the government accountable.

This bill has been kicking around for over two years. First it was Bill C-15 which, at the insistence of the official opposition, was split into two parts. Bill C-15B included the firearms amendments, along with the amendments to the cruelty to animals section. It was in the Senate when the House prorogued. In this session it was re-numbered as Bill C-10 and sent to the Senate for debate. After six days of debate, in December the Senate decided to split Bill C-10 into two: Bill C-10A, an act to amend the Criminal Code, which includes the firearms section and the Firearms Act, and Bill C-10B, an act to amend the Criminal Code dealing with cruelty to animals.

Despite the fact that the Senate does not have the authority to do so, the Senate split this bill in two. Members of the House of Commons should not be required to waive their rights and privileges in order to allow the Senate to exceed its authority.

Why did the Senate divide Bill C-10? Because it could not comply with the government's demand that it ram through the entire bill before Christmas. But why exactly did the Liberal-dominated Senate take this drastic step? Because the government had an end of year deadline contained in the gun registry section. Failure to pass the gun registry portion of Bill C-10 by December 31 would result in yet higher costs for the registry, perhaps another \$4 million a year. We missed the December deadline.

Bill C-10A has been appearing on and disappearing from the legislative agenda for some months now. I can only speculate that the government is leery about placing it before Parliament for debate, perhaps scared over the reception it will receive from the members of the Liberal caucus.

The 22 pages with 63 clauses of firearms amendments in Bill C-10A are a clear admission by the government that Bill C-68 was a failure. The then justice minister told us at a news conference, "The debate is over" on this issue, but if the debate really was over in 1998, why did the minister bring in 22 pages of amendments to the legislation?

After seven years, the waste of a billion dollars and still counting, and massive non-compliance, the government has finally admitted it made a mistake in 1995. There are many more things that need to be fixed in Bill C-68 other than these few tinkering amendments. The insurmountable problems with the gun registry will not be solved by these band-aid amendments.

● (1520)

The only cost effective solution is to scrap the gun registry altogether and replace it with something that will work.

An hon. member: With what?

Government Orders

Mr. Gurmant Grewal: Let me answer that. This means replacing it with a law that has the full support of all 10 provinces, the 3 territories, the firearms community and the aboriginal community. We must remember that six provinces and two territories proposed Bill C-68 in a constitutional challenge that went all the way to the Supreme Court. The western provinces are even refusing to prosecute firearms act offences. Is that not something? For years judges have complained that the legislation was so poorly drafted, at least major segments of the legislation, that it was unenforceable.

The bill would also amend the definition of a firearm in an attempt to ensure that millions of air guns and pellet rifles will no longer be considered firearms under the law. The wording is confusing and ambiguous, and the new definition may not achieve that objective. The justice minister refused to consider a simple amendment to remove that confusion and ambiguity.

In 1995 the justice minister ignored the 250 amendments proposed by the Reform Party at that time. It has become evident that the gun registry is nothing more than a fiasco; another billion dollar boondoggle.

The Auditor General says that the firearms program is the worst example of government overspending that anyone in her department has ever seen. This is a program that the government claimed was going to break even.

When unveiled in 1995, Canadians and the House were told that the gun registry would cost \$119 million to implement, which would be offset by \$117 million in fees. The difference between revenue and cost of just \$2 million was said to be the cost of the program. That is what Canadians and this Parliament were made to believe.

Instead, by the end of this year the registry will have cost nearly \$1 billion, 500 times more than the originally projected costs. Of course this is not the first time we have learned of Liberal overspending gone wild.

Who can forget the HRDC boondoggle when the government used job creation programs as a means to throw cash around like drunkards? More recently there was the Groupaction affair in which the government gave sponsorship funds to its Liberal friends in the name of national unity. This included \$500,000 for non-existent or missing reports.

Since 1993 it has become clear that the Liberal government only admits to wrongdoing when confronted by the media reports or is caught by the Auditor General. However no one on the government side ever takes responsibility for his or her actions.

Where was the former finance minister, who is listening to the debate now, when he spent all those billions of dollars on the gun registry? I will tell everyone where he was. He was writing the cheques. So much for fiscal responsibility. How many other pending fiascos remain hidden?

The firearms registry was introduced with hollow claims that it would help the police do their jobs. Supposedly, it would provide firearms registration information to dispatched patrol officers, allowing them to know before entering a property whether or not the occupant has a firearm and how many guns are in the residence.

The registry was also purported to help curb the illegal gun trade by allowing the police to trace guns to their original owners and enforce the requirement that guns only be sold to licensed individuals. The justice minister gave \$380,000 to a coalition of gun control to promote its anti-gun agenda while it cut \$65,000 from the firearms safety training program. How can the justice minister justify that?

• (1525)

The police cannot rely on the billion dollar gun registry to do anything the Liberals promised. Police will not know where the guns are because there is no legal requirement for gun owners to store their registered firearms at their home address or tell the government where they are stored.

Police will not know where the guns are because between 500,000 and 1.3 million gun owners failed or refused to obtain a firearms licence and cannot register their guns without one.

Police will not know where the guns are because the government has lost track of at least 300,000 guns in the old handgun registration system.

Police will not know where the guns are because the government still has to register between 3.4 million and 12 million guns before the government imposed registration deadline.

Even if police do find the guns, there are so few identifying characteristics on the registration certificates that it is impossible to verify that it is the firearm registered in the system. For example, 4.5 million registration certificates have been issued without the owner's name. Can anyone imagine that? There are 3.2 million blank and unknown entries on gun registration certificates. Of the 3.2 million certificates that have already been issued, more than three-quarters of a million of them do not have serial numbers. How will the government keep track of those?

The bill would remove all of the RCMP's authority for the firearms registration system which it has been responsible for since 1934. All authority previously granted in law to the RCMP would now be transferred to a new government agency under the control of a new bureaucrat called the Canadian firearms commissioner.

We have one question. Why? If the RCMP bureaucracy cannot make the gun registry work after 59 years of experience, how will the new bureaucracy do any better? It is likely to further erode public and police confidence in the gun registry, a system so riddled with errors that it is of absolutely no value whatsoever to the police in their day to day law enforcement functions.

Government Orders

The bill would give the minister the power to exempt non-residents from the application of the Firearms Act, regulations and 14 sections of the Criminal Code of Canada. It exempts foreigners. Why does the justice minister trust foreigners with firearms more than he does Canadian citizens?

The bill would give any designated firearms officer any of the duties, powers and functions of the chief firearms officer. Do Canadians really want private eyes running around with all the powers of a CFO to investigate and harass law-abiding citizens?

How will we ever know if the private eye is using his powers as a firearms officer to investigate people for his other clients and for his personal gain? Even the Privacy Commissioner of Canada is investigating this issue.

Let us look at some statistics. Statistics Canada recently released homicide statistics for 2001. These numbers provide further evidence of the absolute futility of registering guns as a policy for reducing the number of murders. Of the 554 homicides in Canada in 2001, 31% were stabbed to death, another 31% were shot to death, and 22% were beaten to death.

• (1530)

Of the 171 firearm homicides in 2001, 64% were committed with handguns that the RCMP have been registering for the last 69 years, 6% were committed with firearms that are completely prohibited in Canada, and 27% were committed with a rifle or shotgun.

Since 1991 handgun use in homicides has steadily increased from 49.8% to 64.3% in 2001. Over the same period of time homicides committed with rifles and shotguns have steadily decreased from 38% to 26.9%. Between 1997 and 2001, 74% of handguns recovered from the scenes of 143 homicides were not registered weapons.

Toronto's recent wave of street murders, more than 40 since the beginning of 2001, is further evidence disproving the claim that the Liberal government's gun registry is making Canadians safer from crime. Nearly all of the Toronto murders have been committed with handguns and yet handguns have been the subject of registration in Canada since 1934.

Registration has done nothing to stem the use of handguns in murders. In the past 15 years the proportion of all firearm murders committed with handguns has nearly doubled in Canada, from just over one-third to nearly two-thirds.

Pistols are easily concealed, which makes them the weapon of choice for gang members and drug dealers, the two groups responsible for most of the Toronto shootings and even many of the shootings in British Columbia.

Smuggling from the United States is the source of most of the handguns used in Canadian murders, up to 90% according to the Ontario Provincial Police.

In December, when Toronto police chief, Julian Fantino, was asked about the escalation of firearm crimes in his city, he said "a law registering firearms has neither deterred these crimes nor helped us solve any of them".

Even if a national registry could produce information useful in preventing crimes, or even just solving them, it would be at a loss to

produce it on nine out of ten handguns used in Canadian murders since those guns would not have been registered in the first place.

While the licensing process for gun owners was initially turning down more potentially unfit owners than the old firearms acquisition certificate program, the Liberals' haste to boost the number of licensed owners caused them to forgo meaningful background checks on hundreds of thousands of applicants in late 2000 and early 2001. As a result, the rate of refusals for the new licensing scheme is half that of the old system.

How can the new program be making Canada safer if it is turning away only half as many risky owners as the old one? The registry is nothing more than a sinkhole for taxpayer money, to the extent that the gun registry is diverting resources and police officers from real security matters. It is more of a threat to Canadian safety than no registry at all.

It clearly is time for the government to consider shutting down the gun registry and redirecting the money and other resources to real crime-fighting measures.

Depending on who we talk to, there are anywhere from two to seven million firearms owners in the country, the vast majority of whom are law-abiding, tax paying and hardworking people. If a safer Canada is the goal, the solution is not to attack law-abiding Canadians.

We feel there is simply no reason to believe that spending exorbitant money is producing any significant results. The system has no government accountability or transparency. This is just another horrendous example of gross mismanagement and abuse of the government's dictatorial authority.

• (1535)

The regulations are not submitted along with the legislation as I have always said. The government is ruling, not governing, through the back door with regulations. The government failed to submit or table regulations along with the legislation.

For many years, many groups and individuals, including the government, have said they want a safer Canada, but they are not thinking outside the box. They are stuck in a rut and believe that the only way to accomplish this is through the firearms registry.

My Canadian Alliance colleagues and I believe this is the wrong approach. It is not working and it is a waste. We should put more police on the street to go after criminals rather than in offices. This law is simply a waste of money and a betrayal of the trust of Canadians.

Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the member who just spoke has taken us down memory lane through a bunch of speeches that have been given since 1994 on the whole issue of gun control and other actions. The member did not help the public understand the facts very well because of the manner in which he presented some of the facts.

The fact is that the Auditor General did not report that the government wasted \$1 billion. In fact, the Auditor General reported that the amounts were projected to be \$1 billion by the end of 2005.

Government Orders

The member did not say that 90% of the registration applications were incorrect as a form of protest by gun owners to discredit the system. The member did not say that the website registry that Canadians could use was clogged up to inhibit law-abiding citizens from registering on the web. He did not say that 75% of Canadians supported gun control, including the registry. The facts go on and on. The member did not mention that there was some \$140 million of revenue at that time to offset the costs.

If the member wants to participate in debate, it is important that the information that he gives be true, full, plain, and correct, so Canadians will better understand the facts. Canadians deserve better from the member on this.

• (1540)

Mr. Gurmant Grewal: Mr. Speaker, the member's remarks contain a lot of rhetoric. I have given many facts and the source of the facts.

Would he not agree with the Toronto chief of police? Would he not agree with the Auditor General who said that she has never seen over-spending from \$2 million to \$1 billion? Is that not a fact?

How can the member deny that the government told this Parliament and Canadians that the whole system of implementing the gun registry would cost \$2 million? What is the cost now? It is now 500 times more than the original projection by the government. It is up to \$1 billion and still counting. Does the member not agree with those facts?

I gave a huge list of figures during my speech concerning the errors. I will not repeat them because there may be some other questions. The system is full of errors. It does not help police find guns. When police go into someone's residence, the police do not know if there are any guns that residence. The guns may not match the registration certificates. All these things were well articulated in my speech.

Backbench Liberals do not agree with their own government. They know that the government has seriously flawed this legislation. The government failed to accept legitimate amendments. There were 265 amendments to Bill C-68. The government tried to make Canadians believe that it would do it right so it introduced Bill C-15 in the last session. When the House recessed, the bill was in the Senate and was renumbered to Bill C-10. The Liberal dominated Senate split the bill without having the authority to do that.

The facts given during my speech were supported with sources. I am sure members of the House trust the police chiefs, the Auditor General and the research done by the hon. member for Yorkton—Melville who has spoken many times in the House on this issue.

I think I made a good case. I have given the facts to Canadians and I supported my facts with sources. Let anyone challenge those facts and then we will see.

Mr. Paul Szabo: Mr. Speaker, with regard to the Toronto police chief, the member might find it somewhat strange that he can opine on the effectiveness of the registry when it is not even fully implemented. It would probably be premature to make a conclusion on that matter. I do not think that the member should rely on that.

The member said he got his facts right. Well, he did not. If he had only looked at the numbers he would have found that between 1995 and 2001 the per capita incidence of violent crime with handguns was relatively flat over that period. In fact, the new registration which required the registration of long arms saw that long arm violent crime was actually cut in half during the period of development of the gun control legislation and the registry. If the member were to look at the facts, he would see that long arm violent crime in 1994 was greater than handgun crime.

That is not what he presented to the House and that is why I stated that his information was incorrect. Long arm crime was greater than handgun crime when the gun control legislation was first introduced. Now long arm violent crime has been cut in half in the last six years.

I have not done the calculations, but I believe it translates into over 10,000 Canadian lives that have been saved because of the reduction in long arm crime. What are those 10,000 lives worth?

• (1545)

Mr. Gurmant Grewal: Mr. Speaker, it is disappointing that the hon. member will not trust or have faith in the Toronto police chief's statement. Julian Fantino said that the gun registry is not working. I am sorry to hear that the member would discredit that statement as well as those given by the Auditor General.

According to Statistics Canada's 2001 figures there were 171 firearm homicides in 2001; 64% were committed with handguns; 6% were committed with firearms that were completely prohibited; and 27% were committed with a rifle or shotgun. Will the member not believe Statistics Canada's figures?

Since 1991, handguns used in homicides steadily increased from 49% to 64%. That is the figure given by Statistics Canada, not by me. Unlike the member I do not cook the figures.

Between 1997 and 2000, 74% of the handguns recovered from the scenes of 143 homicides were not registered. All these figures come from Statistics Canada and I am sure the member will look into them. He can then read them, calculate them, and then argue in the House.

Mr. James Lunney (Nanaimo—Alberni, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, the war museum in Nanaimo has been collecting military pattern weapons. It has at least three firearms inspectors who are licensed there. It is collecting military pattern weapons from Canada's history: the Boer War, World War I and World War II. However, now, it is not allowed to receive weapons from the public because it cannot transfer weapons that are not registered.

Government Orders

We have been trying to get this sorted out and I wonder if the member might have heard about such problems developing. We even hear that gun safety courses are being harassed and stopped by the government. What is the government's agenda?

Mr. Gurmant Grewal: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member is correct. The government has given \$380,000 to a lobby group which puts out anti-gun propaganda and those kinds of things, but it has cut \$65,000 from the firearms safety training program.

How can the government justify cutting the money from the safety program? And that \$65,000 was for only one province, Saskatchewan. We can explore and see how much money it has cut from other provinces. That does not make sense at all. The government is running amok. It does not have any clear idea of what it is doing.

Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to address Bill C-10A. It has brought back all of the arguments and all of the discussions with regard to the gun control debates, but the fact remains that 74% of Canadians supported the gun control legislation including the registry when it was passed.

Let us look at the facts. I know that Alliance members are not happy with those numbers and I understand their position, but we can agree to disagree.

This past April the Canadian firearms program was transferred from the Department of Justice to the Solicitor General of Canada. Changes in the law represented by Bill C-10A would pave the way to putting this program in a position where we would provide better services and reduce costs for Canadians.

However, it does cost money and I must admit that I am fascinated by the discussion that somehow the government threw away a billion dollars when it estimated that it was only going to cost \$2 million. This is so bizarre that we must ask the question and try to explain why. I will try to identify some of the ways in which people can use numbers or use assumptions to make a case.

• (1550)

The whole aspect of Bill C-10A is to improve the services to firearm owners. It would establish a five year cycle of firearms licence renewals which would be staggered so that it would ease the spiking of renewals. I think members would agree that is a good thing to do.

Completed registration applications would be processed within 30 days of receipt. Gun owners who want to register their firearms should be able to register those within a reasonable period. That has not been the case, but there is a reason and I will address that a little later in my speech.

The Internet and other automated channels would be increasingly used for applications and the issuance of documents. That has not been readily available to those who want to register their firearms. There is a reason for that and I will also address that.

The firearms transfer process would be streamlined and members have raised this issue. The last questioner spoke about transferring firearms from an owner to a collector's museum or something like that. Those things would be established.

What we established during the debates on gun control registry and gun control provisions was that after all is said and done hunters

would continue to be able to hunt. Collectors would continue to be able to collect and sports shooters would be able to continue their hobby. Nothing has changed that.

Canadians know that as a consequence of the gun control legislation and the registry that more and more Canadians are informed of how to safely own, store and transport a firearm. Canadians feel it is important to have rules in place. Canadians take a great deal of comfort from the fact that there are rules and that the government has taken reasonable steps to inform Canadians about all of those provisions so that non-gun owners would also understand that for those who have properly licensed and registered their firearms there should be no concern because they have gone through all of the steps necessary to ensure the safe use and ownership of firearms. That is the objective and I think all members would agree.

• (1555)

Bill C-10A would provide improvements for businesses. It would extend the terms of the firearms business licences and clarify the licensing requirements for employees of these businesses. Members would agree that is an important aspect within the bill.

I could talk more about some of the provisions of the bill, but members are familiar with them. Members actually prefer to talk about who said what and how much it would cost, et cetera.

An hon. member: A billion dollars.

Mr. Paul Szabo: The member wants to say a billion dollars. I will address that.

The gun control program is an investment in public safety. That is what it is all about. As I said, 74% of Canadians supported the gun control—

An hon. member: That was not so.

Mr. Paul Szabo: The member says that it was not so. Well, it was done by an independent survey. I can even tell the member that on a region by region basis the support for gun control was at 59% in western Canada, where that party is represented, 85% in Quebec, 78% in Ontario and 74% in Atlantic Canada. Those are the facts. Canadians supported gun control.

Members say no and I respect their right to disagree with the facts. I have taken this information from published reports that members have at their disposal.

There was a challenge in the Supreme Court and the court upheld the Firearms Act of 2000. The court concluded that both the licensing and registration are tightly linked to Parliament's goal of enhancing public safety by reducing the misuse of firearms and keeping firearms out of the hands of those who should not have them.

Did any of the members of the Alliance who spoke on this bill mention the number of Canadians that were denied licensing or registration of their firearms because they did not qualify? There were reasons why they should not have guns. If they had put that information on the table though, it would have diluted their argument to absolute nothing.

Government Orders

The fact is the system operates in a way to screen Canadians who wish to license or register their guns. Many thousands of Canadians have been denied registration. It is important for Canadians to know that there are people who should not have firearms because of certain facts in their profile. That is the way the law was set up.

At present 90% of the estimated 2.3 million firearm owners in the country have applied for a firearms licence and three-quarters of the licence owners have registered those firearms. The system is working. The previous speaker said we should scrap it and come up with something else that all the provinces would support and everything would be fine. The question was what? There is no what.

The opposition said to just scrap it because they were opposed to gun control and opposed to registration, and all they had to be was negative. They had to be the opposition. That is the role of the opposition, to be negative and to oppose. They are being opposed and they are opposing the facts regardless of the truth and the merit of those facts.

If they want to say that the sky is not blue, that is fine. I can take that. The facts will speak for themselves and Canadians understand that.

The Canadian firearms program encourages the safe and responsible use, handling and storage of firearms. We must keep remembering that it takes time. Yes, we have had handgun registration since 1934. The previous member tried to give us percentages. The fact remains that at the time when the gun control bill first came up, back in 1994, the number of violent crimes with handguns per capita compared to today has remained relatively flat.

I am pretty sure that members over there know and do not want to tell Canadians, but I will tell Canadians, that at the time when the gun control bill came forward violent crime with long arms had a greater incidence than violent crime with handguns. There were more crimes with long arms than with handguns on a per capita basis.

If we were to look at the facts now, we would find that at the end of 2002, according to published independent information, violent crime with long arms is 50% lower than it was in 1994 on a per capita basis. There was a 50% drop in long arm violent crime in Canada.

This is very significant. It says that Canadians learned through the process, through the debate that we had, through all the media, and through all the advertising, et cetera. This was an important public safety issue. In fact, throughout Canada, long arm firearm owners were not being safe with their firearms. Firearms were accessible to those that would use them to commit crime.

This started a change in the attitude of Canadians toward the use of firearms. It was a positive reaction toward those who use them for hunting, sport shooting, and collecting. There was a confidence being built up for those who had useful and laudable goals. Canada has a great history related to firearms, but Canadians have this confidence level now that firearms are being used safely.

Canadians now know that gun owners who have registered their firearms are those who have properly licensed them, are properly

storing them, and will properly transport them, so that all can be safe and everyone can enjoy their sport or activity with firearms.

It is important that Canadians understand that this was a bill that involved all Canadians. It raised that comfort level. It raised the public education and awareness levels. It meant that long arm crime actually went down. The government has not even finished implementing the registration system. It is not all there yet, but the facts speak for themselves.

Much has been said about the Auditor General's report. I think the Auditor General is doing a good job. The Auditor General uses some colourful language or maybe some stimulative language from time to time. She did use the figure of a billion dollars. She said that a billion dollars was the increase in the projected estimates. It was not that we had blown a billion dollars as the members continue to repeat over there. I do not know why they give that misinformation. What is wrong with telling the truth?

The fact is that it was the estimate of the cumulative costs of all of the elements of the gun registry system that would reach a billion dollars by 2005. Why did the estimate get that high? We have to wonder when the government said it was only going to cost \$2 million. Well, there is a difference between \$2 million and a billion dollars. What is it? In fact, the \$2 million, at the time when that question was asked to the then minister of justice, had to do with capital costs. We were talking about capital costs.

In addition to that, we were talking on a net basis and dealing with net revenues. Members have not told Canadians this in debate. I will tell them that the cumulative revenue from registrations has been about \$140 million, which is an offset to the expenses incurred.

Here is what the Auditor General had to say in her report of December 2002. On this particular matter, in chapter 10 on page 13, she said:

● (1600)

—about 90% of the licence and registration applications contained errors or omissions, which was higher than the predicted—

Ninety per cent of the applications had errors or omissions. That is so far beyond what would be the normal incidence in completion of government forms, whether they be tax returns or GST rebate forms, or whatever. There is a reason. As a consequence of these errors and omissions being so serious, it was not something that could be fixed by a person simply looking at it and somehow trying to figure out the information; it required contacting the applicant. It required a substantial increase in the human resources required to process those registrations.

I do not have the figures in front of me as I was not sure I was going to speak to this issue today, but having looked at it, I know that until the end of 2002, which the Auditor General was talking about, the cumulative expenditure on the registry program implementation, et cetera, all the costs, was just over \$650 million, not billion, \$650 million, if we add the projections up to 2005. Of that \$650 million, approximately \$300 million of that additional expenditure was as a consequence of fixing the problem with 90% of the applications which had errors or omissions.

Government Orders

Then we had all these problems and the reaction. Certainly the Alliance was a big part of this, to make sure that firearms owners who were so inclined would do everything possible to frustrate the system.

It is incumbent on any government to support its programs. Because of the significant work that some had been doing to discredit the system, some \$200 million was spent to explain it to Canadians. We are talking about advertising, promotion and public education materials to explain to Canadians how important it was.

These costs would never have been incurred had there not been a planned and deliberate protest against the legislation. I have nothing against protests, I have nothing against delay, but there was a consequence of the activities of those gun owners who did not like the law, who did not want to register and who wanted to try to embarrass the government. It probably cost \$500 million to the end of 2002 for all of the problems that were caused. The unplanned human resources costs were at least \$300 million.

This is published information. For members who would ask where I got the information, I am looking at the Auditor General's report. I can see the projections. I have the numbers right here. Cumulatively, to the end of 2003, the projection is that the overall cost is going to be \$785,710,000. There are also estimated projected revenues which I think get up to something just under \$200 million. On a net basis to the end of 2003, we are talking about somewhere around \$600 million. It is not \$1 billion.

Because 90% of the applications actually were incomplete or incorrect, yes it took a lot of money. Yes, it was very expensive. Yes, there had to be a lot more public education and information out there to counteract all the misinformation that was being given to Canadians by those who disagreed with the law. That is part of the democratic process. Members can say that we blew the money, but governments have to support their programs and they have to inform Canadians about the facts when those who are contrary to any legislation decide that they are going to try to either frustrate it or spread misinformation which would lead to some discomfort among Canadians. Those are the kinds of initiatives Canadians want to see.

With regard to the Auditor General's report, I commend it to members. If they simply want to provide the half story, that is great. However, I will stay in the House and I will point out to Canadians every time one of the members speaks up and does not give all the information because I think Canadians deserve true, full and plain disclosure, even by the Alliance.

• (1605)

Mr. Gerry Ritz (Battlefords—Lloydminster, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, the basic thing in all that drivel the member just went through is he is calling your constituents and my constituents subversive and stupid for not conforming to this idiotic program. I have been in your riding and I have seen your folks, Mr. Speaker. They are not those things. They are good hardworking folks. They are hunters and fishermen. They do not like this program any better than my folks do at home.

He stood there and said it was not this amount of money or that amount of money. He came up with 10,000 lives having been saved. Where did he get a statistic like that? That is so far from accuracy it just boggles my mind.

I was torn between totally ignoring that drivel and walking away or standing up and asking some questions and comments. It was a tough call to make.

Where does the member come off saying that the Auditor General's numbers are this and that and everything like that? People can downplay it and say anything they want to get themselves or some of their people re-elected or whatever, but it does not make it true. Ten thousand lives saved? It is nowhere near that number. He said that long guns were so terrible in crime and everything. The weapon of choice in crime has always been a handgun and it always will be because a person can conceal it. Long guns never were the problem and never will be. Exemptions have been given to whole groups of people where long guns are a problem and they get an exemption.

How can the member square everything that he has said here? It just does not add up. Canadians are far smarter than he gives them credit for.

Mr. Paul Szabo: Mr. Speaker, in response to drivel, subversive, stupid and all the other language the member used about me or my speech and I said—

Mr. Gerry Ritz: No, I did not say you.

Mr. Paul Szabo: I am sorry if the member wants to get excited and just throw off a few items, but I stand behind the figures that I read.

The per capita violent crime with long arms was greater than handguns back in 1994-95. The rate per capita of long arm crime actually has decreased by 50% to the end of either 2001 or 2002. It might have been 2001 because of the delay. At the same time, and I am a chartered accountant so I look at numbers a lot, I saw that the violent crime rate per capita with regard to handguns was relatively flat over the same period of time.

My conclusion was that since we have had registration of handguns since 1934 and the incidence of long arm crime per capita was higher than handguns when the first bill on gun control came in, all of the work that has been done by hon. members in this place to educate the public and to require the licensing and registration of long arms in fact has been effective. It is reflected in the reduction of deaths and violent crime by long arms.

The member asked where I got the figure of 10,000 from. I will look for it and I will try to provide him with the information.

One member started talking about absolute numbers. In a growing population, crime by guns will go up simply because there are more people in the country over that period of time. If one continues to show the figures on a per capita basis, and knows the rate per capita at the beginning and knows what the per capita situation is now, one can project what the level of deaths from long arms would have been and it can be compared to what the actual occurrence is.

He asked where I got the figure 10,000 from. My recollection is it was probably closer to 18,000, but I did not have to go that high because even if it was almost 10,000, lives have been saved because of the gun control registry in Canada. It is shown simply by the actual versus the projected per capita crime rate. There it is.

Government Orders

• (1610)

Mr. Bob Mills (Red Deer, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, I cannot really believe that the member believes what he is saying. I have heard propaganda before in communist countries, but I really cannot believe that the member believes what he is saying.

I have done a professional poll in my riding. Well over 80% today are still opposed to this. At the time, I received 13,000 letters that were opposed to this and 17 in favour. That is the kind of response there is out there.

Let me ask the member a question. I have one constituent who has registered 23 guns. All 23 registrations say that the make of gun is unknown, the length of barrel is unknown, and the serial number is unknown. That is on his 23 registration certificates. How is that going to help the police or stop crime so they know what kind of weapon is being used?

Also, what makes the member think that criminals are so stupid that they are going to use guns registered in their names? Are we not talking about preventing crime?

Mr. Paul Szabo: Mr. Speaker, I am as incredulous as the member is himself. With regard to the question of a criminal when committing a crime not using a gun that has been registered, that presumes the weapon is left at the scene or is recovered. It does not seem quite relevant.

What is important is that we have a system of licensing and registering firearms, both long arms and handguns. It provides a comfort level to Canadians that those who have registered their firearms have gone through all of the necessary steps to ensure the safe use and enjoyment of their firearms.

It is an offence to have in one's possession a firearm which is not registered. It is not those that are registered that are going to turn out to be the problem. For those who have not registered, it is going to identify that their intent is certainly much different.

How much does it cost to register a firearm? We could say \$10 covers five or ten guns. We register our dogs. We register our cars. I guess the member is going to stand up and say there is no point in registering a dog because a registered dog would not poop on a lawn. It is as silly an argument as the member's that anybody who registers a gun will not use it in a crime. Let's get off the poop.

• (1615)

Mr. John Williams (St. Albert, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, I know that the hon. member is an accountant and he already admitted that he knows his numbers. This concept of saving 10,000 lives is patently and absolutely ridiculous. Look at the math.

It is seven years since the gun registry came into force, approximately 2,500 days ago, which would suggest that there were absolutely zero killings today with long guns and there were four each and every day on average before it came into force. That is patently and absolutely untrue, stupid, ridiculous and his math is completely out to lunch.

How can he as an accountant stand there without doing the mathematical tests and claim to believe that number of lives have been saved? It is just outrageous.

Mr. Paul Szabo: Mr. Speaker, I do not have the chart with me but we are talking about how many violent crimes and deaths resulted from long arms in 1994. It was 2,000 or something like that. We could look at a period of some six or seven years and even assume by a modest population increase that the number might go up to 2,500 a year. Over six or seven years maybe the average is only about 2,200. One would expect probably about 25,000 or 30,000 deaths over about a seven year period. However, if the per capita rate of long arm deaths in Canada was cut in half, would that not be reasonable?

Let me also say to the member and all Canadians that as of the latest information I have available, 9,000 applications to register firearms have been denied because those people were not of a character or had the background that would allow them to have firearms. Some 9,000 Canadians do not have guns today because of this law. How many lives has that saved?

Mrs. Betty Hinton (Kamloops, Thompson and Highland Valleys, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, I have enjoyed that yarn as much as anybody else in this room today, but I am sure you have listened to enough of this discussion that you would like to hear something maybe a little different. Therefore I will give you a history lesson.

By the way, Mr. Speaker, I will be splitting my time with my colleague from Battlefords—Lloydminster.

The history of firearms registration is history replete with racism, bigotry and intolerance. Both Liberals and Conservatives should hang their heads in shame for being so intolerant toward so many minority groups in Canada.

As far back as 1837, the governing elites of this country targeted the Irish, and only the Irish, with firearms control legislation. Yes, the ancestors of the Liberals and the Conservatives were as bigoted as any elites anywhere on Earth. They decided, unjustly and unfairly, that Irish-Canadians were threats to peace, order and their corrupt style of governing.

When the rebellion broke out in Upper and Lower Canada, legislation was introduced prohibiting unlawful training of persons in the use of arms, "and it authorized seizure of arms "collected or kept for purposes dangerous to the public peace".

Forty years later, Prime Minister John A. Macdonald targeted the Irish with that legislation because he feared the Fenians in the United States might invade Canada. Sir John A. Macdonald was a political grandfather to those across the way and that tiny group sitting way off in the left of the corner in this place. John A. Macdonald called himself a liberal Conservative.

We are here today listening to Conservatives call themselves liberal and Liberals describing themselves as conservative. No wonder Canadians cannot tell the difference between those two parties. There never was any difference, going right back to their political birth.

Government Orders

It was not only Sir John A. who believed minorities and the Irish were less than equal. In 1878, after riots in Montreal, the Liberals, under prime minister Alexander Mackenzie, denied an accused person's right to a trial by jury and ordered the licensing of firearms owners in certain districts of Canada. Most of those certain districts were Irish neighbourhoods. The justice minister of the day was eager to embrace legislation based on the statutes in Britain that were aimed solely at repressing and abusing the Irish.

Today things are a little different. Liberals have the right to abuse absolutely anyone who will not vote for them.

Only a few years later, Sir John A. Macdonald and the liberal Conservatives found a new minority group to target and abuse. After the Riel rebellion in 1885, aboriginals, Metis, disloyal white settlers and who knows what other visible minorities in the Northwest Territories were forbidden to possess improved arms. They could carry and use ancient old smoothbores, like muzzle-loading shotguns and rifles, but nothing with an improved or rifled barrel.

We are only up to 1885, and the minorities targeted by the bigots in the Liberal and Conservative parties are aboriginal, the Irish, Metis and the so-called disloyal white settlers.

Let us skip ahead to 1913. This time it was the Conservatives, feverish with anti-immigrant hysteria, deciding to license handguns. Robert Laird Borden, the Conservative prime minister, thought immigrants were dangerous and he wanted to ensure that they did not have access to handguns. By passing legislation forcing the registration of handguns, he could use the RCMP and local police to ensure that immigrants did not have access.

Of course any good citizen of Anglo-Saxon stock could register them, and by now the Irish were no longer despised by the Liberals and the Conservatives. Liberals and Conservatives know a valuable voting block when they see one.

I would guess the Liberals and Conservatives of 1913 said to each other, "Let's pretend we don't despise the Irish and they will vote for us". They were still bigots and racists but they hid it better than they had previous to 1913.

It must be embarrassing for today's Liberals and Conservatives, having such a foul legacy of bigotry and racism.

In 1919 another invisible enemy was spotted that required more action on the firearms front. According to Allan Smithies and W.T. Stanbury, writing in the *Hill Times*, the Winnipeg strike of 1919 raised fears of a Bolshevik revolution.

● (1620)

Robert Laird Borden was calling himself a unionist prime minister. That means that he had both Liberal and Conservatives behind him. Let me quote from Smithies and Stanbury in the March 10 *Hill Times*.

The federal government responded to the establishment's fears of a Bolshevik revolution that were erroneously attributed to non-British "alien scum" by prohibiting non-British immigrants from owning firearms and ammunition. The government was convinced that non-British immigrants with their "...bad habits, notions and vicious practices," were "...thorough-paced Bolsheviks, disciples of the torch and bomb," who showed "...a greater readiness (to) resort to the use of weapons than do our own people".

That by the way was taken from a speech by the minister of justice in 1919 and Smithies and Stanbury found it in *Hansard*. Does it not sound a lot like Liberal justice ministers of today? Their kind of people do not hunt, do not target practice and do not own firearms. If their kind of people do not, then no Canadian should hunt, target practice or own firearms. After all, it is their kind of people who really count in Canada. Those who do not count are those who do not vote Liberal.

In July 1920, old bigoted Bob Borden ordered the licensing of gun owners and the registration of rifles. Some Canadian residents had money and Bobbie Borden needed it. British subjects who owned shotguns were exempt. The Liberals and Conservatives eagerly trotted after bigoted Bob, agreeing that only white people of Anglo-Saxon stock were to be trusted.

What all this means is that Liberals and Conservatives did not like people from the Ukraine, Russia, Greece, Germany, Denmark, China, Japan, India and every other country except Great Britain. They did not like anybody but British subjects and they did not trust anybody but those from Great Britain.

Liberals and Conservatives share a common history of racism, bigotry and intolerance along this line.

Moving along to the Great Depression in 1934, federal legislation was rushed through in 10 days. This was after the Communist, Tim Buck, drew greater crowds than Conservatives and Liberals were able to draw. The legislation to which I refer put the RCMP in charge of handgun registration. Smithies and Stanbury say that it was because the RCMP were the first line of defence against internal disorder. They were the most reliable for breaking strikes, smashing the radical trade unions, controlling the unemployed and hounding political dissenters.

In addition to being anti-immigrant, bigoted and intolerant, the Liberals and Conservatives shared another trait in common, a tendency toward fascism.

Smithies and Stanbury say that confiscation of firearms from non-white or ethnic persons was common, dating back to the first world war. Registered firearms were seized from Japanese Canadians who also saw their homes and possessions seized and handed over to friends of the governing parties.

But there is more.

The Liberals' anti-Quebec tendencies came into play in 1940. Fearing fifth column activity among enemy ethnic communities, the Liberals introduced universal firearms registration in 1940. What they truly feared was insurrection over conscription.

I wonder if the present justice minister is proud that Liberals had so little trust in Quebecers that they saw fit to have them register all their firearms. The prime minister of that time was Mackenzie King, the man who loved his dog, himself and the Liberal Party. He never forgot them in his prayers.

Government Orders

In the west when the government insisted during World War II that all guns be registered, there was evidence of more bigotry. Those who did as the government asked and brought their rifles and shotguns in to be registered discovered who was a good Canadian and who was not. People with names that were eastern European had their rifles and shotguns seized. People with good respectable Anglo-Saxon names were allowed to register and retain possession.

The reason for my little history lecture today is transparent. If we do not learn from past mistakes, we are doomed to repeat those mistakes. Let us learn from the errors of the past and not go back to labelling our ranchers or duck hunters as disloyal white settlers. They made the country.

These are good people like Paul Reibin from my riding who is a recreational gun owner, Rolf Pfeiffer, a resident of 100 Mile House and hundreds of law-abiding citizens who refuse to accept this infringement on their rights and the government's blatant disregard for private property rights. They stand loud and proud against the gun registry.

• (1625)

The bill fails to take into account lifestyle and private property rights. How can we call ourselves democratic while we endorse legislation that tramples the basic rights of our citizens? What a legacy, what a fraud, what a scandal. Canadians deserve better.

Mrs. Marlene Jennings (Parliamentary Secretary to the Solicitor General of Canada, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I listened with interest to the hon. member's history lesson on gun control or gun registry in Canada. I found it quite interesting. I found there were also some elements that were quite dismaying. However she mentioned lessons learned. The lessons have been learned.

The fact that we have a Charter of Rights and Freedoms that ensures Canadians will not be singled out and will not be discriminated against on the basis of their ethnic origin, the colour of their skin, their religious beliefs, their race or their gender demonstrates that the Canadian government has, regardless of political stripe, over time learned the lessons. One of the lessons may be the lessons that the hon. member raises about gun registry.

I would like to bring the member however into the present, into 2003, and ask her what is her view on this. On one hand, she says that the overwhelming majority of Canadians do not support gun control. On the other hand, a poll in January 2003 indicated that a majority, 74% of Canadians, supported the program's elements, including licensing and registration. It is an Environics—

• (1630)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bélair): The hon. member for Kamloops, Thompson and Highland Valleys.

Mrs. Betty Hinton: Mr. Speaker, first, I did not raise that question and I never once said that we were opposed to control in some form. We have had controls since 1940. What we are opposed to is registration. Second, the Charter of Rights mentioned by the member intentionally omitted property rights.

What we are talking about and the lesson I want the member to learn from past mistakes, which I took the time to go through, is that we cannot criminalize innocent people because it fits our agenda.

I went through this and explained all the different categories of people who, over the last century, have been targeted. The target we have today is duck hunters and ranchers. If you do not understand the lifestyle, then you need to learn to understand the lifestyle before you start condemning these people, these honest people who built this country, as criminals because they own firearms.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bélair): Please address your comments to the Chair and not directly to any other member.

Mr. James Moore (Port Moody—Coquitlam—Port Coquitlam, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague from Kamloops for her speech. I also appreciate that the member for Mississauga South is here. As well, my colleague from Notre-Dame-de-Grâce, I believe is her constituency in Montreal, raised a question.

The Liberals say constantly that they are in favour of gun control and that somehow if we are opposed to the registry, we are opposed to gun control. It is not quite that simple. For example, I have a private member's bill before the House because there is something frightful missing in Canada's Criminal Code.

As we know, and I ask my colleague to comment on this, in Canadian law today, if we have been convicted of manslaughter, murder, rape, domestic abuse or committed any dramatic violent crime, we can purchase a gun after five years.

In the Canada that we should be creating, my private member's bill says that if in our lifetime we have ever raped a woman, ever beaten our spouse or ever committed a violent crime, we should never get to own a gun. However the Liberals think that it is okay for people to own firearms. If a husband who has beaten the crap out of his wife goes to jail for a couple of years, he is capable under law of buying a firearm after he is released. That should not be allowed in Canada.

Liberals brag about gun control. Meanwhile they are registering guns in a meaningless way rather than passing a meaningful law to keep guns out of the hands of criminals.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bélair): I am not sure if the word crap is parliamentary. Please avoid using it.

Mrs. Betty Hinton: Mr. Speaker, I will be really careful what I say. I will not repeat what my colleague has just said but I will tell him that this is the first time I have been made aware of his private member's bill and I can hardly wait for it to come to the floor. It is the most common sense I have heard and the freshest breath of air in a long time. I will definitely be supporting it. I would agree that it would be the way we would have to go. One simply should not be able to own a firearm, and if one could actually do that now under the law, after five years, that is a major loophole. That is something that should have been looked at more seriously.

Government Orders

We should maybe start concentrating on what is actually important to Canadians and what keeps them safer, such as, on spending a billion dollars on a wasted gun registry, think of how many RCMP we could have put on the street to actually make people safe.

* * *

• (1635)

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Mr. Geoff Regan (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, there have been discussions among the parties and I think that if you were to seek it you would find unanimous consent for the following motion. I move:

That when the House adjourns on Thursday, May 29, 2003 it shall stand adjourned until Monday, June 2, 2003 provided that the report stage of any bill reported from committee on May 29, 2003 may be taken up on or after June 2, 2003 and that any notices of motions may be received by the Clerk no later than 2:00 p.m. on May 30, 2003.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Bélair): 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)

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AN ACT TO AMEND THE CRIMINAL CODE (CRUELTY TO ANIMALS AND FIREARMS) AND THE FIREARMS ACT

The House resumed consideration of the motion in relation to the amendments made by the Senate to Bill C-10, an act to amend the Criminal Code (cruelty to animals and firearms) and the Firearms Act, and of the amendment, and of the amendment to the amendment.

Mr. Gerry Ritz (Battlefords—Lloydminster, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, again we are having some interesting debate here on the firearms legislation. It just keeps coming back to haunt the government and rightly so, because the government is now saying that Bill C-10 in this form is the panacea. It does not matter how it brings it back in here, either in through the Senate, or through the back door or the front door: the government says this is going to make everything better.

As for the \$1 billion the Auditor General found, whether we say it is a full billion or only \$680 million, she did not have time to go to the well again and get all the numbers because she had to report to Parliament on a given day. She got up to \$680 million and said they knew it would be a lot worse than that, that they knew it would be \$1 billion within a year.

Another little factor has come to light, too, and perhaps Mr. Speaker will correct me if I am wrong, but the dollars that went to Quebec to implement its own registry are not reported in the same way. Quebec does its own thing in a lot of instances and this is one of them. The cash transfers that are done in the political envelope to that province are not reported in the same way on this bill. The numbers could actually be higher yet. That may bear some looking at.

Bill C-10 is supposed to be the panacea. It is supposed to make everything better. The government claims it will streamline things and pick up on the errors and omissions. The government is saying this will all be cleaned up under this one bill. That is a big job.

We have heard a lot of arguments from Liberals on the other side today trying to justify what has been done, how it has been done, and how they can go home and sell it to their folks. They are claiming that it is all about public safety and then they cancel the training. If this is about public safety, those types of things have to be done.

Canadians are a common sense people. We just do the right things. We do not have to be told again and again. We do not need legislation telling us to store our firearms safely. We do that as a matter of course because it is common sense to handle firearms safely. These guys seem to think they need more rules and regulations.

Here is what amazes me. We have seen what happened with the SARS outbreak in the last little while, but Bill C-68 created this monster today. As a result of the over-production of that bill, the overreaction to a situation that happened in Montreal where they politicized the heck out of it, the government came out with Bill C-68. But then we had a SARS outbreak and the government would not do a thing; it procrastinated to the point where it got totally out of hand. So we have two ends of the spectrum here. The government overreacted with Bill C-68 and under-reacted with the SARS crisis. We have to try to justify one to the other and I do not think the Liberals can do that; they are found lacking at both ends.

The Liberals have talked about streamlining this registry and saving \$3 million a month. They say they are going to save that but they still will not tell us what the cost is. They are saving \$3 million of what? Is it \$100 million a year or \$200 million a year? It is going to be a five year cycle now, so for anybody who is in the system, when their five years are up they will not know what it is going to cost them to re-register the guns they have already registered for \$10 or whatever today; maybe the fee was waived. They do not know what it is going to cost, so maybe we will start to recoup all of that money, but it will be solely on the backs of firearms owners. Those owners who have more than one firearm could be hit hard. We do not know, but we do not trust these guys.

The member for Mississauga South talked earlier about this huge 90% error and omission rate. He was talking about hundreds of millions of dollars in those errors and omissions. No one from outside the CFC has had a look at the errors and omissions other than those cards, the PALs, the POLs and the little registration cards themselves that my guys are getting back. The errors and omissions I have seen are committed not by the gun owner or the gun but by the CFC.

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One fellow I know received 12 cards back because he registered 12 long guns, twenty-twos, shotguns and rifles. Every one of those cards was identical. Every card indicated "unknown" under barrel length. The serial number was unknown. The make of gun was unknown. The action was unknown. He did not send in the card like that. It would not have been entered like that. The officials would have gone back to him right away. I have seen PALs with somebody's picture and somebody else's name on them. Nobody sent them in that way.

So as for the errors and omissions, the member for Mississauga South said it was those terrible gun owners who subverted the government. He said it was a protest. What a load of hogwash. It did not happen that way at all. Yes, there were people who waited until the bitter end. People do that every year with Revenue Canada; I have been one of them. We do not want to send in that money because we do not think we are getting any bang for our buck. The member said these serious errors and omissions are all because of gun owners. That is hogwash. That will not fly at all.

• (1640)

As for the whole idea that this will streamline things and save money, that there will be more done on the Internet, as members well know, the e-mails we all receive and the work that is done on the Internet now is prone to error. People do have to type it in. The best way to say it is garbage in, garbage out. The gun control registry system is still going to be prone and susceptible to errors. It is bound to happen when we are talking about makes of firearms and serial numbers of firearms. A lot of them have no serial number. This has to be entered; the system has to come to grips with this. This is where the problem started and the bill will in no way ease any of those facts or figures. It will continue being a huge, dark money loss.

There is another side of the argument. My colleague from Yorkton—Melville has done a tremendous job on this file. He has been light years ahead of everybody on this one and it turns out that he was right in a lot of his submissions. He also talks about how enforcing the firearms bill could be a huge black hole. Let us look at convictions and tracking people down and so on; it would not be hard to spend another billion dollars enforcing it, simply against people who had no intention of going against the law but who, because of the way this thing is written, implemented and enforced, become criminals.

There are a lot of us who find ourselves in that situation. There were things we thought we had registered, but now it turns out the government has lost them. So now we are criminals and we have to try to fight our way out of that bureaucratic malaise there.

I have had some discussions with some CFC officials on one piece that I own. When I explained everything that was wrong with the way the registration did not carry through, the guy said I had two choices. He said I could weld it shut and keep it or I could turn it in. Those were my two choices.

I said that neither one of them was acceptable to me. I talked to the RCMP. The officer said they could not even take it in because it is considered prohibited at this point. He said, "Sir, maybe the best thing I could do is say that we never had these discussions". He was ready to sweep it under the rug. That is public safety: just ignore it and it will go away.

The bill started out as a combination of a cruelty to animals bill and some changes to the Firearms Act and what it came back as is cruelty to firearms owners. That is really where we are at this point.

Mr. Speaker, in your riding you know there are hunters up there. I have been through your riding and it is a beautiful piece of Canada, beautiful country, and there are a lot of hunters and fishermen and so on. You probably enjoy that yourself, Mr. Speaker, so I know you are going to have some problems with this in trying to justify where this has gone.

If the government were really and truly concerned about public safety and felt that this was the right way to go, why have we had six amnesty periods since 1998? Why is it taking that long to implement the bill? We have seen bills come to the House and slam-bam they are gone.

The majority government brings in a bill that it wants. It has what is called a majority. It has control of the schedule and the planning. It decides what is up on a given day and how long it will stay up. It can push through the bill, but with this we have seen them test the waters and pull back, test the waters and pull back, which has a lot more to do with backbench solidarity over there. We have seen some comments from a lot of these folks over there who say, "Oh, this is terrible. We should not vote in the \$59 million that they wanted at the end of the year. We should not". But they all stood up today and invoked closure. A Liberal is a Liberal. They just cannot help themselves. They have to be there when their government comes knocking and calling.

There is another huge thing. The government talks about streamlining and being more cost effective, yet the Liberals are adding millions more people and firearms to this list with Bill C-10, such as all the pellet guns and anything with certain muzzle velocities and so on. A lot of them have never been tested for a decision on what they are; a lot of them have been modified and so on.

We have a lot of kids who are 8, 10 or 12 years old, especially out west, who use pellet guns to control varmints around the farmyard. These kids are not criminals. They cannot vote. They are not old enough to vote out this piece of junk, but they are criminals because their pellet guns are over the muzzle velocity that some Liberal member decided on. How ridiculous. There are millions of kids out there with pellet guns. They are not hurting anyone. They are plinking sparrows and crows and so on. For all we know, maybe they are helping us control the West Nile virus every time they shoot a crow.

There is also another big problem. Some of the members on the other side have said that public support is at 74%, that the public just loves the bill, but that is until people find out what it costs. If those polls are really accurate, can anyone explain to me and the people of my riding why eight provinces and three territories are dead set against this? Five provinces and three territories will not administer it. They will take no part in it. If the polling numbers are accurate, why are the provinces not on side? They are the same people, the same constituents. It does not make any sense to me at all.

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Then there are the police chiefs. Some of them have been politicized. We have certainly seen that in the way they handle it, but a lot of them are now saying to their police forces, "Please do not arrest the guy because we are not going to do the paperwork. We cannot make it stick. We have an unenforceable law. Even though the Supreme Court loved it, we cannot implement this on the ground".

• (1645)

Whether we streamline this through Bill C-10 or ignore it for another five years and try to bring it back, nothing will change here until we change the government on the other side.

Mr. Geoff Regan (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I listened with interest to the comments of my hon. colleague. He mentioned polls. I think numerous polls have shown that the Canadian public support the gun registry.

If his party says that it supports gun control but not the registry, how does he square that with the fact that his party has always talked about following the popular will of the public, doing what their constituents say and following their wishes, when they know that poll after poll says the same thing, and that as recently as January of this year an Environics poll said that the majority of Canadians, 74%, support the program and its elements, including licensing and registration? How does he square that circle?

Mr. Gerry Ritz: Mr. Speaker, that is not hard to do. I have seen some of the survey questions. I would have to say yes to some of the questions and be part of that 74% because that same survey talks about safe handling, safe storage, training and screening. I have no problem with any of that. None of us do. That was all done before under the old FAC process that we had for 15 or 20 years before the Liberals twisted it around into this particular procedure.

The government has claimed that the Firearms Act under Bill C-68 would have more effective screening, and the member for Mississauga said that same thing today. He went on about percentages of rejections, that 9,000 people have been denied a firearm.

The screening under the old FAC was twice as stringent. More people were denied a licence at the FAC process from 25 years ago than are rejected under the Bill C-68 screening that we see now. We had a good system in place. It was working. Why did we have to change it? Nobody knows. It became a political football.

Let us look at what happened when this type of registration was introduced around the world. Great Britain banned all private ownership of handguns in 1997. Violent crime rose 10% the next year and then doubled up to 2000 again. In Australia, stringent new gun control laws were introduced again in 1997. Homicides involving firearms have doubled and armed robberies have increased 166%. New Zealand had it in 1983 and killed it. The police over there declared that the policy was a complete failure.

It has been tried in jurisdictions all around the world and has proven to be an utterly disastrous situation. Yet those guys go merrily down the road, saying stats this, numbers that, but they pervert them and twist them to make their point. It is not factual. It is

not accurate. It just off the map and playing politics with the situation.

Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I indicated some figures during my speech and I am still looking for the flowchart. However the member may want to comment on these statistics. This document is a homicide survey produced by Statistics Canada involving homicides only.

In 1991 there were 50 homicides with handguns and in 2001 there were 64. In 1991 there were 103 homicides with rifles and shotguns and in 2001 there were 46, less than half.

I believe that the document from Statistics Canada shows that there has been a dramatic drop in long arm homicides over the past decade compared to a relatively flat scenario for handguns. I will not table it but I would be happy to provide copies of it to members who would like to have this information.

Mr. Gerry Ritz: Mr. Speaker, the member actually makes the point for me. He is showing handgun problems on the rise. We have had a handgun registry since 1934. It is not working.

Then he is saying that the stats for long guns were 103 homicides in 1991 and 46 in 2001. They have dropped to half. We still do not have a workable registry and yet they have dropped to half. Why would we continue with it? We do not need it.

• (1650)

Mrs. Karen Redman (Kitchener Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, in our debate today with respect to Bill C-10A, I think it is important for members of the House to remind themselves of the history of gun control in Canada.

I was interested in hearing somewhat, I felt, a little bit of English, a little bit of politicking going on with an earlier opposition member's comments on the history of how we arrived at where we are today.

We are here today as a result of cautious and considered action by previous parliaments which, over the decades, have put in place legislation that was designed to meet specific needs and specific challenges in the Canadian context.

The law of the land has changed over time. It has changed as our communities, our society and the world around us have changed and evolved.

We are painfully aware of the criminal misuse of firearms and the tragic consequences of firearms violence in our communities.

Some of the issues related to firearms are relatively new, or certainly their magnitude is new. I brought to the House's attention the example of the problems posed by guns used by urban street gangs, including youth gangs in many urban centres.

Some statistics help to tell the story of why it has been necessary to establish more safety standards for firearm use. In the past, there was a historic average of over 1,000 firearm related deaths per annum. Greater numbers of Canadians are hospitalized each year because of firearm related injuries. Among industrialized countries, Canada has had the fifth highest firearm death rate for children under the age of 15. This is truly tragic.

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I am certain that everyone present here today, indeed all Canadians and members on all sides of the House, want to see concrete measures taken to reduce the criminal use of firearms and to reduce firearms related violence.

The gun control program is an essential part of this initiative. It is vital to keep guns out of the hands of people who should not have them, for their own safety, for the safety of others and for that of our communities.

Let us look at domestic homicide for example. We know that shooting is the leading cause of death in female spousal homicide. An overwhelming majority of domestic homicide shootings of men and women are with so-called ordinary rifles and shotguns.

In 1998 statistics showed that 63% of Canadian spousal firearm homicides involved rifles and shotguns. Sawed off rifles and shotguns killed a further 21% of Canadian spousal firearm homicide victims in that year.

Those are some of the reasons why a practical response to domestic violence must include a serious approach to both rifles and shotguns.

Internationally there is an increasing concern with respect to illicit movement of firearms to feed criminal markets. Countries have come to recognize that international co-operation is key to combating illegal firearms and stemming firearms related crime. It is a vital part of not only our safety agenda but that of the international community.

If we look a little at the backdrop of the current legislation, we see that the registration of handguns was first required by law back in 1934. Four decades later, the Criminal Code was amended to require persons wishing to own firearms to hold a firearms acquisition certificate.

During the period of 1992 to 1994, the firearms acquisition certificate process was enhanced. A requirement for a person to submit references was introduced, along with a 28 day waiting period before a certificate could be issued. Mandatory safety training was also introduced at that time, along with clearly defined safe firearms storage regulations. These measures continue to be in place today.

● (1655)

Bill C-68 was passed in 1995 and it established the Firearms Act and amended part III of the Criminal Code. It came into force in 1998, setting the stage for the regime that we have today.

Just to remind ourselves, the legislation included, among other things: enhanced eligibility criteria for being allowed to possess a firearm; a requirement for licensing of firearms owners; a requirement for the registration of all firearms; provisions allowing for the regulation of the import and export of firearms; and tougher Criminal Code penalties for serious firearm offences.

Under the current legislation, licensing of all firearms owners became mandatory January 1, 2001. The registration of all firearms became mandatory as of January 1 this year.

Put in context, the current regime is the result of careful progression and of measured consideration. Canadians now have a

gun control program that is there to ensure that the public safety is protected and, at the same time, to ensure that legitimate gun owners and gun users are not unduly burdened. We have the balance right.

The issue now is, and this has been reflected in the recent public debate, how to make the program work as economically and as efficiently as it can. This, too, is in the public interest.

The gun control action plan announced by the Minister of Justice and the Solicitor General in February responds in concrete, practical ways to the observations and concerns that have been expressed by Canadians. We know we need to make the program work in the most effective manner, making the best use of public resources. There is a clear plan of action in place now and it is being implemented as we speak.

That is why Bill C-10A is so very important. It is a vital element of the plan to improve the gun control program. Bill C-10A would allow for important changes to the gun control program, building on the existing legislation. We are on the right track.

The bill includes amendments to the Firearms Act and the Criminal Code that would support and facilitate public compliance with the firearms program. The amendments would also consolidate administrative responsibility for the program, as well as help Canada meet new international obligations. I would underline and stress again that this is an issue that many nations are grappling with.

While the amendments the bill would make respond to concerns expressed about the firearms program's efficiency and cost, I would emphasize that these changes and these economies would be found through the administrative process. The amendments do not change the basic public safety goals and the elements of the Firearms Act, nor that of the gun control program.

Let me also mention some key amendments. Bill C-10A streamlines the process of transferring firearms from one owner to another. This would not only result in the elimination of a step in the approval of transfers saving time for all concerned, but it would also reduce costs.

The bill introduces pre-processing of non-residents who wish to enter Canada with firearms, for example, those who want to come to Canada on a hunting trip. This would also assist in reducing the lines at the border and support businesses that are involved in servicing sport hunters and shooters.

The process for licence renewals will be streamlined. That would include the renewal of the licences in an evenly staggered way, rather than receiving a huge surge of applications every five years. This is a key practical measure and will result in cost savings and better client service.

In addition, under Bill C-10A business licence terms will be extended from one year to three years for most businesses. This again means less cost and a simpler system.

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Those and other changes proposed in Bill C-10A are a direct response to the extensive consultations that we have undertaken over the past several years with program partners and stakeholders. It is important to recognize that included the policing community and gun owners themselves.

• (1700)

The changes provide solutions to issues raised by the firearms community. While doing so, the bill will allow for more effective administration without a negative impact on the safety provisions which are fundamental to the entire program.

It is a win-win situation. Firearm owners and businesses will be getting many of the changes that they have told us they are seeking. The Canadian public at large wins by getting a more cost effective program while maintaining the public safety aspects on which they place such a high value.

I note that the government will not be losing touch with Canadians on the firearms front. There is a commitment in the gun control action plan, as announced by the Solicitor General and the Minister of Justice on February 21, to hold consultations with stakeholders and the public on the program design and the service delivery. I am happy to say that this commitment also includes consultations with parliamentarians.

I personally look forward to participating in those consultations as part of my service to my constituents. I am certain that others here in the House also look forward to that same opportunity to contribute in a positive manner.

We also have the opportunity today to make another contribution. We can ensure that Bill C-10A moves forward so that vital improvements in the gun control program that are important to all Canadians can be made as soon as possible.

A group of police officers was on Parliament Hill a few weeks ago. A couple of members of the Waterloo Regional Police were part of that delegation. I spoke at length with them as to what their views were of the gun control act and whether they supported it.

They mentioned to me some interesting statistics, such as that over 2,000 inquiries are made to the gun registry on a daily basis by police forces and that while it is often heard as an anti-gun control lobby tactic that criminals do not register firearms, the firearms registry allows police to track stolen weapons. That is very important to them. They support this legislation.

According to an Environics poll that was done recently, over 74% of Canadians support the spirit and the enactment of this legislation. It is time for the debate to conclude so that we can move forward with this very important piece of legislation that Canadians have said they value and need.

Mr. Jay Hill (Prince George—Peace River, Canadian Alliance): Madam Speaker, I want to devote a couple of minutes to comments and a question regarding the use of time allocation yet again on this very important issue of so-called gun control or firearms registration.

The reality is that I and many of my colleagues would have liked to represent our constituents on this very important issue. This issue

simply will not go away, especially in the rural ridings across the nation. We are not going to be allowed the time to speak yet again.

When the legislation that this is attached to, Bill C-68, and I would add the infamous Bill C-68, was debated in the House, the Liberal government brought in time allocation. That was eight years ago. The bill we are debating today, Bill C-10A, contains some 22 pages and 63 clauses of amendments. If the Liberals had allowed a little more time to debate this issue eight years ago, perhaps they would not have to continually come back with more and more amendments that the member says are going to fix the problems.

People in the real world outside the Ottawa bubble and outside the Liberal Party of Canada know that nothing is going to fix this. Yet here we are again with time allocation and members are being denied the right to represent their constituents and are being denied the right to speak in the House of Commons. The Liberal member had the audacity this afternoon to call this a win-win situation, a win-win situation that has cost Canadian taxpayers \$1 billion and counting, the net cost of which was originally going to be \$2 million to implement. She called \$1 billion a win-win situation. It is absolutely unbelievable.

She bragged that there are 2,000 inquiries a day. The policeman that she spoke with told her that there are 2,000 inquiries a day, but she did not tell us how accurate the information is that goes back to the police. If it is inaccurate, it is worse than no information. We know from the Auditor General that we cannot trust the information in this computer program.

I would like to ask the member what guarantees we and the people of Canada can have that if Bill C-10A does not fix all of the problems in this failed and farcical firearms registry, the government or perhaps the new prime minister, the member for LaSalle—Émard, will cancel the thing. Are the Liberals prepared to make the commitment that if Bill C-10A does not live up to the great and wonderful improvements that she talked about in her canned speech that was probably given to her by the justice department, she and her party will cancel this abomination?

• (1705)

Mrs. Karen Redman: Madam Speaker, I am very happy to answer the issues raised by my hon. colleague opposite. I realize that this is a contentious issue for many members on all sides of the House.

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This is something that is in the public good. To talk about \$1 billion is so misleading, I am absolutely amazed. It is \$785 million that has been spent to date. One of the issues of this entire process has been that we have continued to consult. I ask the member opposite, is it not good government? I contend it is absolutely good government. Not only do we re-debate this issue in the House, and this is not the first time this issue has been debated in the House, but we continue to consult with Canadians. As a matter of fact, we embrace the Auditor General's reports because that is how we improve the system and make it responsive to Canadians.

What the government will not do is abandon the bedrock ideals that this is predicated on, which are a safer community and a safer Canada. That is what Canadians have asked us for. We will continue to work on that. We will continue to consult with Canadians to improve this system but we will not abandon those principles.

Mr. Myron Thompson (Wild Rose, Canadian Alliance): Madam Speaker, this debate and the kind of reaction we just had from the member are really frustrating and aggravating.

Since 1993 for example, the people of this country have been tabling petitions in the House numbering over hundreds of thousands for the government to take some action against child pornography to protect our children. There have been thousands and thousands of signatures. Polls indicate that 90% to 95% of all Canadians are begging members of the House of Commons to quit spending their time wasting money on a program that is not going to work and start dedicating it toward a program that will work, that will protect thousands of young children in this land, that will get pedophiles and sexual predators off the streets and protect communities.

Instead Liberals have spent millions and billions of dollars to come up with ideas that just do not make sense. Criminals will not register their guns. Does that not sink in? They will not. Criminals who intend to use a gun in the commission of a crime will get a gun regardless of what kind of program is in place. They have the capability of doing it. There are people supplying guns illegally. Instead of fighting that with all the dollars, the government is bringing forward legislation to make sure that honest people do their duty.

Why does the member not get up and demand that people in her own party start bringing in legislation that will fight child pornography which is a detriment to this land? It is affecting thousands of victims. The registry of long guns is not near the problem.

What is wrong with the government that its members sit on their backsides and will not get out of their seats to fight the real problems instead of being a thorn in the sides of most Canadians who are law abiding? What is wrong with the government? What is wrong with the member who will not represent 90% of the people in her riding who I know want to get rid of child pornography? She should get up and fight for the right things.

• (1710)

Mrs. Karen Redman: Madam Speaker, I have to acknowledge the passion of my friend opposite. Child pornography is a huge issue and it is one that Canadians care about. I would invite the member on that issue as well as the issue of gun control to work with the people on the ground, to work with the officers across Canada.

Over two million hits have been made on this system since 1998 by police forces. This is a tool that they value. I invite the member to work with me and all members of the House and with people right across Canada. We will battle this issue.

An hon. member: You guys should be ashamed of yourselves.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Bakopanos): I do believe that it is out of respect for hon. members that we put our questions or comments and then we listen for the answers from the hon. members and we try as much as possible not to shout back and forth. It is also very difficult for the Chair to hear hon. members when they respond to questions or when they ask a question.

Mr. Geoff Regan (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I wonder if my hon. colleague from Kitchener Centre would like to address the issues about the cost of the program a little further. How does she feel the measures that have been taken in this bill will help to address those costs?

Mrs. Karen Redman: Madam Speaker, that does seem to be a bit of a contentious issue. I would be the first to acknowledge that this has not been a perfect system. That is why we are bringing in recommendations to address some of the concerns of the Auditor General.

Quite clearly the original proposal when we brought in gun control was predicated on the full participation of the provinces. It was also predicated on some revenues that actually were deferred and some of them were not realized. That did change the actual cost but there is no way near the amount of expenditure that the opposition would have us believe.

This is a good system. As a matter of fact, a representative of the Canadian Police Association told me that before 1995 about \$30 million a year was spent on gun registry and only \$10 million of that was borne by the federal government. After we brought in our legislation, that entire amount was borne federally.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Richard Marceau (Charlesbourg—Jacques-Cartier, BQ): Madam Speaker, I very much appreciate the calming effect you have on the House. I will try to follow your lead, after the outburst from my colleague, the member for Wild Rose.

I rise to speak to this bill, consideration of which began a long time ago. In fact, the government tried, unsuccessfully, to pass what is now known as Bill C-10 during the previous Parliament, and since then has had to contend with a variety of problems of a procedural nature, and let us say it, some related to political leadership.

It is unusual that at this stage in the debate the Senate is asking the House to split the bill. Of course, this bill was passed by the House at third reading and referred to the Senate for its consideration. The Senate's wish to split the bill in two, at this advanced stage in the legislative process, seems to be bizarre, and may not even be permissible.

So, we would like to point out the particularly eloquent relevance—I never thought I would hear myself saying this in the House—of the amendment to the motion before us, submitted by our colleague from the Canadian Alliance. The amendment reads as follows:

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That the motion be amended by deleting all the words after the word "That" and substituting the following:

“, in relation to the amendments made by the Senate to Bill C-10, An Act to amend the Criminal Code (cruelty to animals and firearms) and the Firearms Act, this House does not concur with the Senate's division of the Bill into two parts, namely, Bill C-10A, An Act to amend the Criminal Code (firearms) and the Firearms Act, and Bill C-10B, An Act to amend the Criminal Code (cruelty to animals), since it is the view of this House that such alteration to Bill C-10 by the Senate is an infringement of the rights and privileges of the House of Commons; and

That this House asks that the Senate consider Bill C-10 in an undivided form; and
That a Message be sent to the Senate to acquaint Their Honours therewith.”

Members will recall that this controversial legislation was already split by Bills C-15A and C-15B during the first session of the 37th Parliament.

On December 5, the Chair heard a lengthy point of order on the issue of dividing the bill. In our opinion, the Senate is overstepping its powers by again proposing division of the bill.

According to the procedures and practices of the House of Commons, the Senate has no power to make any orders at all to the House; at most, it may make suggestions.

We all know that the upper chamber, the Senate, is non-democratic in nature. We realize that those who sit in the other place are appointed by the Prime Minister. That is a quite incredible form of nepotism in an advanced democracy such as ours. In short, it is unacceptable that unelected people, friends of the party and particularly friends of the Prime Minister, can come and tell us what to do here in the House where the elected representatives of the people sit, the 301 men and women who were elected by the people of Quebec and Canada.

I am very surprised that we can accept such proceedings in a representative democracy, such as Canada claims to be. It should be the duty of every elected member in this House to tell the hon. senators, “You have no right to do what you are doing. You have no right to tell the House of Commons, with its elected members, what to do”.

This wake-up call is too late for the Senate. Could it be a deliberate stalling tactic by the government in order to prevent passage of this bill? Considering the prevailing climate in the Liberal caucus—as we saw during question period, the shots are flying; serious divisions are being aggravated by such things as the leadership race—anything is possible.

Dividing the bill in two does not change anything in the Bloc Quebecois's stated position.

As we address the tricky issue of cruelty to animals, the arguments invoked by the various points of view must inevitably collide.

● (1715)

On one hand, there are the powerful lobbies, some with a position that is a bit extreme and, on the other hand, there are more reasonable groups that make a real contribution to the public debate by presenting very specific arguments.

However, the major coups of groups in the first category have the unfortunate and overly frequent consequence of lumping together all the animal rights activists. The government is being forced to retreat

by some of these groups due to a lack of leadership, as seen in many areas.

In terms of amending the Firearms Act, is it necessary to spell out the firearms registry fiasco highlighted by the Auditor General? A program that, originally, was to cost barely a few million dollars and then pay for itself, will have cost one billion by the end of the fiscal year, without producing the anticipated results.

It is important not to forget the firearms registry fiasco; the Liberal government's lack of rigour in managing the firearms program has created two victims: the taxpayers because they will have to dig into their own pockets to keep the program going, and second, as serious, is that this has provided ammunition—no pun intended—to those ideologically opposed to the bill. This means that many people who had supported gun control are asking themselves questions, and some are even saying, “Yes, I support this in principle but perhaps not at that price”.

Due to its incompetence, the federal government has become the objective ally of those most strongly opposed to any form of gun control. I think that Quebeckers and Canadians will remember the huge responsibilities resting on this government's shoulders.

This legislation could always be split into as many bills as it has clauses, but it would still be a bad initiative. In fact, by literally combining two such distinct issues in one bill, the government should have anticipated the impasse that lay ahead.

Today, faced with its inaction and incompetence, the government is once again interfering with the right of members to speak freely on the matter, by having the government majority pass a time allocation motion for the consideration of this bill. Once again, the rights of members of Parliament are being violated.

The Liberal government should have put the finishing touches to its bill before introducing it. The difficulty it is having getting it passed reflects to some extent the ad hoc attitude and lack of leadership in the back rooms of government.

Finally, what the Senate has done this time, with the arrogance for which this non-elected institution is well known, is the proverbial straw that broke the camel's back. Such an affront to decisions of the House and an attempt to strip members of Parliament of their powers, even if only temporarily, are unacceptable and argue more than ever—this is one more example to add to the list—for abolishing that undemocratic, unelected and frankly outdated chamber.

● (1720)

The Speaker: Before moving to questions and comments, I have a ruling to deliver to the House on a point of order. I hope the hon. member can be patient for a little while. It will not take too long.

[English]

POINTS OF ORDER

BILL C-10

The Speaker: I am now prepared to rule on the point of order raised earlier today by the hon. member for Sarnia—Lambton concerning the procedural acceptability of the motion in response to the Senate message concerning Bill C-10, the Criminal Code amendment.

[Translation]

I would like to thank the hon. member for Sarnia—Lambton for raising this matter, as well as the hon. government House leader for his comments.

[English]

The hon. member for Sarnia—Lambton has contended that the motion responding to the Senate message on Bill C-10 cannot be considered because the House has no power to waive its constitutionally guaranteed rights and privileges.

The hon. government House leader maintains that it is precisely the decision as to whether the House chooses to insist on these rights and privileges that members are being asked to make.

I would like first to reiterate what I said in a ruling on a related question delivered on December 5, 2002. Your Speaker cannot comment on the internal workings of the Senate. My procedural authority is limited to the application of the rules and practices of this chamber as they affect this chamber.

The hon. member for Sarnia—Lambton raised a number of interesting points with respect to the Constitution Act of 1867 in making his case. While I do not doubt that they are worthy of consideration, hon. members know that questions of a legal or constitutional nature are not dealt with by the Speaker. This is clearly set out in *House of Commons Procedure and Practice*, at page 219 to 220.

The hon. member also made reference to proceedings before the Senate of Australia. Although it is often useful to make reference to precedents in other jurisdictions when the application of our own rules is unclear, this approach is not without pitfalls of its own. While proceedings in other countries may bear a strong superficial resemblance to our own, there are often important differences and rules and practices which make comparisons problematic, if not misleading.

In the case before us today this point, while not without interest, is somewhat academic.

Both my own earlier rulings and the ruling of Mr. Speaker Fraser on a related case make quite clear the Canadian practice in such cases. As Mr. Speaker Fraser stated on July 11, 1988, at page 17384, of the debates:

The cure in this case is for the House to claim its privileges or to forgo them, if it so wishes, by way of message to Their Honours, that is, to the Senate, informing them accordingly.

I cited this remark in my ruling of December 2, 2002, and with all respect to the hon. member for Sarnia—Lambton, I have heard nothing today which persuades me that the House should not follow

Speaker's Ruling

the course on which it is now embarked. My earlier ruling pointed out that the Speaker had no power to enforce the rights and privileges of the House with respect to what went on in the other place. At the same time, it is also not my role to reject messages and thereby halt progress on legislation which this House has approved.

I would also like to point out that the motion under discussion recognizes the existence of the rights and privileges of this House. The question as it is stated is not that these rights and privileges should be deemed not to exist or to repeal them. Rather the motion states that in the case before us, Senate amendment to Bill C-10, the House will not insist that its privileges be respected. The rights and privileges of the House continue to exist and the House continues to have the right to insist that they be respected if it wishes. No argument has been presented to the Chair that suggests that the House may not decide to insist or not insist as it sees fit.

I feel that I can only maintain the position that I took earlier, a position congruent with the stance adopted by Mr. Speaker Fraser in 1988. While there are serious considerations concerning parliamentary privilege that must be considered in dealing with the motion concerning Bill C-10, the judgment that is needed on these matters is that of the House and not that of the Speaker.

I therefore find that the motion concerning Bill C-10 is properly before the House and that it is for the House to decide if it will insist on its rights and privileges or waive them in this case.

* * *

● (1725)

AN ACT TO AMEND THE CRIMINAL CODE (CRUELTY TO ANIMALS AND FIREARMS) AND THE FIREARMS ACT

The House resumed consideration of the motion in relation to the amendments made by the Senate to Bill C-10, an act to amend the Criminal Code (cruelty to animals and firearms) and the Firearms Act, and of the amendment, and of the amendment to the amendment.

Mr. Jay Hill (Prince George—Peace River, Canadian Alliance): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the opportunity to ask my Bloc colleague a question.

Before I ask my question, I would like to say for the record on behalf of my constituents of Prince George—Peace River, who I am always pleased and privileged to represent in the House of Commons, that never before in the history of Liberal boondoggles is there anything to rival the Firearms Act for the sheer stupidity of this legislation.

I wanted that on the record because, as I said earlier in a brief question and comment that I made, unfortunately the government has again invoked time allocation and many of us will not have the opportunity to represent our constituents with a 20 minute or even a 10 minute speech on the legislation before us today, Bill C-10.

I could not agree more with my Bloc colleague when he talked about the problems with the Senate. I think he referred to the fact that it could split this bill as many times as it wanted. It can be divided up into bite sized pieces and it is still a zero.

Speaker's Ruling

My concern and the question I want to raise with the member is one of computer security. This list, even as inaccurate as it is, obviously is not secure. We already know that. That concern for computer security is one that I hear repeatedly from constituents who have not registered their firearms and will not register their firearms. When IBM and pentagon can routinely have their systems hacked into, obviously this is not a secure list either, and I hear that.

Does the member also hear these types of concerns being expressed by his constituents in the province of Quebec?

• (1730)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Richard Marceau: Madam Speaker, I thank the hon. member for Prince George—Peace River for his question. First, I would like to comment on how ironic it is that what we are dealing with in this debate is an unelected and undemocratic chamber trying to impose the splitting of a bill, while here in the House of Commons, which ought to be the democratic counterbalance to the other place, we are again having imposed upon us a time allocation motion, thereby depriving members of the privileges they ought to be entitled to as elected representatives within a representative democracy.

[*English*]

Mrs. Marlene Jennings: Madam Speaker, I rise on a point of order. The Speaker has ruled on the point of order which was raised by the member for Sarnia—Lambton and I find it curious. Is it in order for another member to continue commenting on a Speaker's ruling?

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Bakopanos): I have just checked with the Clerk, and the hon. member could raise that issue if she wanted to.

[*Translation*]

In fact, the hon. member has the right to comment on a Speaker's ruling. These are comments, if I have understood properly, because I have heard nothing else.

The hon. member for Charlesbourg—Jacques-Cartier.

Mr. Richard Marceau: Madam Speaker, while members are trying to have a democratic debate in the House, how ironic that the Parliamentary Secretary to the Solicitor General would deny me the right to say not only what I think of that other place, but also what I think of the time allocation motion.

This is a good example of the attitude of the Liberal government and the Liberals in general with respect to how the House operates.

I was saying then, to answer my hon. colleague from the Canadian Alliance, that unlike his party—and he knows this; we have agreed to disagree—we support gun control in principle; his party does not.

The problem we have raised many times, is that, due to its incompetence and bad management, the Liberal government has given strength to the bill's ideological opponents, to those philosophically opposed to the very principle of gun control. This point is raised over and over when people say they agree in principle.

Unfortunately, the government's actions and how it has managed the program have raised many questions in our minds. This is what is so sad about how the government has managed this whole program.

Mrs. Marlene Jennings: Madam Speaker, I would like to thank the Chair for clarifying the Standing Orders as I had asked. I think that it goes without saying that members are free to ask for clarifications regarding the Standing Orders in order to better understand the rules and procedures of the House.

I have a question for the hon. member from the Bloc Québécois. The member spoke about opponents and said that it is unfortunate that the federal government's mismanagement of the firearms program and the firearms registry has given ammunition to people who are ideologically opposed to the program.

Will the member from the Bloc Québécois acknowledge here today that ideological opponents have never let go, since day one, on the issue of a real gun control program, a real, effective and efficient firearms registry, and that they have never stopped arguing against this program and the very idea of it?

Whether or not the government managed the program badly or not, ideological opponents to it would have continued to fight it, as they did even before the Auditor General's report was released. First, will the member from the Bloc Québécois admit that?

Second, on the issue of program costs, I have in front of me—and this was tabled and discussed in the House by the Minister of Justice and by the Solicitor General—the actual program costs from 1995-96 through 2002-03, so over an eight-year period.

The total cost is \$785,710,000. Therefore, if we break it down, we see that administration costs were \$72.5 million; communications and public affairs cost \$64,347,000; costs for the development and maintenance of the registry were \$251,040,000; program delivery costs were \$380,364,000; system administration, including the transition, cost \$11,073,000; the costs for the national weapons enforcement support team, the total cost for this eight-year period—however, this has only existed in the last three years—is \$6,382,000. The total cost then is \$785,710,000. That is very clear.

I would ask the member to answer these two questions. The costs are very clear. Will the member admit that regardless of how the program has been operated in the past, or will be operated in the future, ideological opponents will continue to have the same position?

• (1735)

Mr. Richard Marceau: Madam Speaker, I want to thank the hon. member for Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine for her question.

Briefly, I would like to say that those ideologically opposed remained opposed, naturally. But before this scandal and before the Auditor General pointed a finger at the Liberal government's incompetence, they were preaching in the desert so to speak. It had gone under the radar. Nobody was really talking about it. Yes, there was discontent in certain quarters. However, overall, it was relatively well accepted in Canadian society as a whole, despite some resistance.

Speaker's Ruling

What the Liberal government has achieved through its incompetence is get it splashed over the front pages of the newspapers again. The ideological opponents took that opportunity to say, "See, we were right. It makes no sense. Not only does this program make no sense, but any form of gun control management is bound to result in this kind of overspending". That is precisely what I criticize the federal government for.

They could have gone on being opposed and preaching in the desert, but this scandal and the government's incompetence have provided them with a wonderful forum to attack the principle of gun control.

[*English*]

Mr. Geoff Regan (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I welcome the opportunity to speak to the House and to Canadians about Canada's gun control program.

We have heard a lot in recent months about the focal points of the public safety initiative of the bill and the program. We have also heard much about the costs of the firearms program and the concerns expressed by the Auditor General in her recent report.

Canadians are justifiably concerned about the program's delivery costs and problems. At the same time they continue to support our efforts to keep guns out of the hands of individuals who may pose a risk to themselves, their families, their neighbours or their communities. Those are important efforts.

We must not forget why the government brought in this public safety program in the first place. Yes, we decided to act because of incidents like that which occurred at École Polytechnique in Montreal and other gun incidents. The government acted also because Canadians demand that their laws reflect our values as a society, the values of Canadians generally, not just in one part of the country but across the country.

Canadians demand safe homes and communities now and in the future. That is what we are committed to deliver. The firearms program encourages the safe use of firearms, provides vital information to police and helps to keep guns out of the wrong hands. The gun control program enhances public safety by controlling access to firearms and ammunition, deterring their misuse and controlling specific types of firearms.

When I hear the heckling and yelling from across the way, it reminds me that of course is the party which came to Ottawa promising to bring new decorum to the House of Commons, to act in a civilized manner, to show respect—

An hon. member: Yes, and we learned from you.

● (1740)

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Bakopanos): I did say earlier to hon. members that it is very difficult for the Chair to hear over the shouting. I would appreciate very much that the hon. member addresses any comments through the Chair and that hon. members wait until there is a questions and comments period to let their comments be known to all Canadians, not just to the Chair and members in the House of Commons.

Mr. Geoff Regan: Madam Speaker, the underlying philosophy behind the Firearms Act is to prevent people who are a danger to themselves or others from getting access to firearms.

As for registration, it provides an essential link between a firearm and its rightful owner. Registration works to enhance accountability for one's firearms, for example by encouraging safe storage which helps reduce gun theft and accidents. We have seen that. The ability to trace firearms back to their owner also facilitates police investigations and helps crack down on illegal smuggling.

Information about firearms and their owners also facilitates the enforcement of prohibition orders. It allows police to take preventive action, such as removing firearms from situations of domestic violence, an absolutely critical function of this program.

The government recognizes the important role that firearms play particularly in rural Canada for hunting, predator control, wilderness protection, target shooting and other very legitimate purposes.

We recognize that the service that has been provided to firearms owners needs improvement. The bill we are debating today in fact contains measures that will contribute significantly to the firearms centre's efforts to provide better service. It is important that it have the opportunity to make these changes to improve its services.

While the firearms program is still in its infancy, we can already see clearly the benefits to enforcement agencies and the Canadian public. Over 1.9 million firearms owners are licensed. More than six million firearms are registered. Police agencies are accessing the online registry 2,000 times a day. The number of lost or missing firearms has declined very significantly. Fewer firearms are being used in crimes. Our firearms safety training is recognized internationally as a strong model for other countries to follow.

This program has an impact every day on the safety of Canadians. Let us not forget that the majority of Canadians strongly support gun control and continue to see it as a valuable investment in public safety.

What are Canadians on the front line saying about the program? Both the Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police and the Canadian Police Association support the firearms program and its essential crime fighting tools. Recently for example, David Griffin of the Canadian Police Association stated:

We know that there has been a lot of attention on the issue of costs, but it is important to realize that with any public safety program, there is a cost to ensuring public safety.

He went on:

The licensing of all firearms owners and the registration of all firearms are important public safety features of this program that have required a significant investment to establish, however there are significant long term benefits to these measures.

Speaker's Ruling

Ottawa police chief Vince Bevan reiterated his support stressing that six inquests over the past decade, three of them in Ottawa, recommended licensing firearms owners and registering firearms. He said "If this legislation saves even one life, it will have proven its worth".

Mike Niebudek, vice president of the Canadian Police Association, also made it clear:

Illegal guns start off as legal guns. Registration helps to prevent the transition from legal to illegal ownership and helps to identify where the transition to legal ownership occurs.

In fact, Canada is one of many western nations that are taking the steps toward firearms control. The licensing and registration components are fully in line with other countries, including Great Britain and Australia.

Victims of crime have noted that while prevention is not cheap, it is a sound investment. In the words of Steve Sullivan at the Canadian Resource Centre For Victims of Crime:

Politicians and media are screaming about the \$1 billion spent on the registry in the last nine years, yet not one of them seems as concerned about the estimated \$6 billion per year that we spend on gun deaths and injuries in Canada.

The Firearms Act is about enhancing public safety. It is about preventing firearm related deaths and accidents. Too many young people are injured and killed in preventable firearms incidents. That is why the public health sector has been steadfast in its support for the firearms program.

• (1745)

As Kathy Belton, a co-director of the Alberta Centre for Injury Control and Research, has said:

Guns kill more youth in the (15 to 24) age group than cancer, drowning and falls combined. The gun control program is still in its infancy, yet data suggests it has already caused a decline in gun deaths and crimes.

Time and again we have quotes from people, whether they are with the Canadian Police Association, the Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police, people involved with victims of firearms' incidents and the public health sector, so many groups are saying that this is important legislation.

The government is working with members of the House and Canadians to make the gun control program more efficient and less costly. It is important work, necessary to enhance public safety. The legislation we are considering today would go a long way to help achieve this goal.

We have heard a bit today about the various costs of the program. We have heard a lot over the past number of months about that. However what we do not hear so much from the other side is the fact that the vast majority of the costs of the program are for the licensing program, which of course gun groups support. However our friends across the way do not want to recognize the fact that most of the costs of this program would be there anyway for the licensing which the gun groups support. They become all upset about the cost of this but ignore this vital fact.

I cannot understand why they want to ignore that. I cannot understand either why they want to ignore the fact that a clear majority of Canadians support registration. They support this program and its elements, including registration.

I realize that there are certain members who do not support it themselves obviously. I am sure there are ridings in which the majority of the people do not support this. However the polls again and again across the country clearly show that the majority of Canadians support it.

It is not surprising to me that we see the Alliance so captivated, so trapped in its own region and its own ideology, we might say, because of the fact that it espouses concerns and points of view that remain with a small proportion of Canadians.

It is interesting to me that the Alliance members have failed to recognize that as long as they take that approach, as long as they keep on the same wave length and maintain an approach that limits them to one part of the population, to one segment of the views of Canadians, there is no way they will move forward until they recognize that Canadians have a range of views on this. Until the Alliance really wants to listen to other points of view and respect other points of view, I do not see how they can expect to come to this side of the House. I do not know if they really do. I cannot imagine how they can expect that.

We all know that the Supreme Court of Canada upheld the Firearms Act in 2000. In fact, the court concluded that both licensing and registration were tightly linked to Parliament's goal of enhancing public safety by reducing the misuse of firearms and keeping firearms out of the hands of those who should not have them.

I recognize the fact that there have been problems with this program and it definitely needs improvement. As I look at different government programs within different government departments, it is not uncommon that I get frustrated. When I look at how departments operate sometimes I wonder how they can do some of the things we hear about. In the reports of the Auditor General, for example, we hear about things that outrage all of us and are very frustrating. We hear things throughout government in this case. Does that mean we cancel the program? Does that mean we should not have support for health care, for example, or other kinds of programs that the government provides? No, it does not mean that.

It means we have to do a better job of administering those programs. It means we have to find ways to make government work better overall. One of the things the bill would do is respond to that need to make government work better and government programs work better.

I see the need in so many other areas as do, I am sure, my colleagues throughout the House see the need to find improvements throughout government, throughout departments.

We know that 90% of the estimated 2.3 firearms' owners in the country have applied for a firearms licence. Three-quarters of licensed owners have registered their firearms. I do not own firearms but I have had some experience with them. I have enjoyed shooting at targets and so forth. When I was young I was once offered the chance to go hunting with a fellow from my native town of Windsor, Nova Scotia. The gentleman actually said that I should come rabbit hunting with him. At the time I was about 12 years old and the idea really appealed to me. Unfortunately, it never came to be. I would have enjoyed it very much.

Speaker's Ruling

•(1750)

My father-in-law is an avid hunter and, in fact, grew up hunting. He had the unfortunate situation that his father left the family when he was very young. He ended up having to support the rest of the family by having to work, and the way he did that was largely by hunting and feeding the family with whatever he could hunt.

I have great respect for the fact that hunting is an important part of our country. I come from a part of the country in Atlantic Canada in which most people live in rural areas. My riding is primarily suburban but it also contains rural parts. I am aware of the concerns about this program and I am aware of the need to improve it. There is no question that it needs to be improved but I am also aware of the benefits of the program, as I stated throughout my comments.

I am aware of the fact that there definitely is a need to improve many other government programs. I cannot see it as being a surprise or a shock to any of us to find that government programs need to be improved in order to work better. When there is talk of a new program being brought forward by government, I ask myself whether government will be able to administer it well. I guess we ourselves sometimes have to measure and examine whether a program is worthwhile.

However, when the chiefs of police and the Police Association of Canada are saying to us that they support this program—

An hon. member: No, police officers do not support it.

Mr. Geoff Regan: My friend across the way is saying that they do not support it. We know very well that the Canadian Police Association, again and again, has indicated its support. As recently as this year it supported the bill. It supports the program and it wants us to maintain it.

In my comments earlier I quoted from several occasions when police officers and representatives of the chiefs of police and the Canadian Police Association have spoken strongly in favour of the bill. I do not know who my colleagues are listening to but it certainly is not the police association or the police across the country.

We know the program recognizes the important role that firearms play, especially in rural Canada, for hunting, predator control, wilderness protection, target shooting and other legitimate purposes.

One of the things I hear from people who hunt is not just that they like to go out and shoot things but that they enjoy being out in the woods. They enjoy not only the pursuit in looking for deer, rabbit or whatever it is they are hunting, but they enjoy being out, the exercise, the fresh air, sometimes the camaraderie of being out perhaps with their friend, with a son perhaps, or with someone else who they want to spend time with, and it is valuable to have that time in the woods and to have that time together.

There has been a lot of talk from the opposition members to the bill, a lot of suggestions that what the government is trying to do is to create a situation in which guns can be confiscated. I find it offensive that members across the way and others who are opposed to this bill, rather than stick to the real issues in the bill and what it deals with, try to create these bogeyman about the fact that the government supposedly will come and take all their guns, which is absolute nonsense, and they know that. They know that is absolute

nonsense and yet they continue to spout this kind of stuff and try to foment upset across the country.

An hon. member: It has already happened.

•(1755)

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Bakopanos): Okay. Once, twice and three strikes you are out, because that is what will happen now. I will have to name the members who are being very abusive of the Chair. May I say that or not?

We have only three minutes left before I put the question. Could we please allow the hon. member to finish?

Mr. Geoff Regan: Madam Speaker, for a party that came here promising to improve decorum in the House, it is remarkable that it does not want to show me respect. I did not heckle or yell at those members when they were debating. I sat here and listened to their comments. Why do they not want to show any respect for anyone else's point of view?

I think we all have to listen. All of us can learn from listening to other points of view. I think the government and all members have to do that more often. We need to listen carefully to other points of view and consider them. I certainly do and I think my colleagues across the way ought to do that, but they are not interested in hearing other points of view.

They know that there has been a lot of debate on this issue. In fact, I wonder how many other issues over the past 10 years on which we have had as much discussion, as much consideration and as much debate in the House of Commons as we have had on this issue of firearms. When they say that there has been no discussion, no consideration or that they have not had enough of a chance to have their say, we are hearing the same arguments over and over.

What are they bringing to the discussion that is new? What new information are they offering to Canadians? What new policy are they offering Canadians? I suggest they are offering nothing, which is why Canadians reject them over and over and will keep doing so.

I think that in due course, and who knows when, Canadians will decide to change the government, which happens every once in a while, but I am convinced that unless there is a dramatic transformation in the Alliance Party, it will not be the party that forms the government whenever this government is replaced. It will be somebody else. Sooner or later we will be gone but there is no doubt in my mind that it will not be that party replacing us. Members of the Alliance Party have failed to comprehend the views and values of the broad range of Canadians. They have failed to open their minds to those points of views and concerns.

An hon. member: Have you ever been out west?

Mr. Geoff Regan: A gentleman asked if I had ever been out west. Yes, I have been out west. In fact, my mother was from Saskatchewan. My grandfather, who was a member of Parliament, was from Meadow Lake, Saskatchewan. I have respect for the views of the west. However we have to reach beyond our regions, beyond Atlantic Canada and beyond the west, and consider the views across the country.

Speaker's Ruling

[Translation]

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Bakopanos): It being 5.58 p.m., pursuant to order made earlier today, it is my duty to interrupt the proceedings and put forthwith every question necessary to dispose of the amendments tabled by the Senate to Bill C-10 now before the House.

[English]

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 Acting Speaker (Ms. Bakopanos): All those in favour of the amendment to the amendment will please say yea.

Some hon. members: Yea.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Bakopanos): All those opposed will please say nay.

Some hon. members: Nay.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Bakopanos): In my opinion the nays have it.

And more than five members having risen:

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Bakopanos): Call in the members.

• (1830)

[Translation]

(The House divided on the amendment to the amendment, which was negated on the following division:)

(Division No. 157)

YEAS

Members

Abbott	Ablonczy
Anderson (Cypress Hills—Grasslands)	Bachand (Saint-Jean)
Bailey	Benoit
Bigras	Blaikie
Borotsik	Bourgeois
Breitkreuz	Cadman
Cardin	Casey
Casson	Chatters
Clark	Comuzzi
Crête	Dalphond-Guiral
Davies	Day
Desjarlais	Desrochers
Doyle	Duceppe
Forseth	Gagnon (Québec)
Gagnon (Lac-Saint-Jean—Saguenay)	Gallant
Gaudet	Gauthier
Goldring	Gouk
Grewal	Grey
Guay	Guimond
Harper	Harris
Herron	Hill (Prince George—Peace River)
Hill (Macleod)	Hinton
Jaffer	Johnston
Keddy (South Shore)	Kenney (Calgary Southeast)
Laframboise	Lalonde
Lill	Loubier
Lunney (Nanaimo—Alberni)	Marceau
Martin (Winnipeg Centre)	Masse
McDonough	Ménard
Meredith	Merrifield
Mills (Red Deer)	Moore

Nystrom
Pallister
Picard (Drummond)
Rajotte
Reynolds
Robinson
Schmidt
Solberg
Spencer
Stinson
Thompson (Wild Rose)
Toews
Wasylycia-Leis
White (North Vancouver)
Williams

Obhrai
Paquette
Plamondon
Reid (Lanark—Carleton)
Ritz
Sauvageau
Skelton
Sorenson
St-Hilaire
Strahl
Thompson (New Brunswick Southwest)
Vellacott
Wayne
White (Langley—Abbotsford)
Yelich — 92

NAYS

Members

Adams	Alcock
Allard	Anderson (Victoria)
Assad	Assadourian
Augustine	Bagnell
Barnes (London West)	Beaumier
Bélaïr	Bélangier
Bellemare	Bennett
Bertrand	Bevilacqua
Binet	Blondin-Andrew
Bonin	Bonwick
Boudria	Bradshaw
Brown	Bryden
Bulte	Byrne
Caccia	Calder
Caplan	Carroll
Castonguay	Catterall
Charbonneau	Chrétien
Collenette	Cotler
Cullen	Cuzner
DeVillers	Dion
Discepolo	Dromisky
Drouin	Duplain
Easter	Eggleton
Eyking	Farrah
Finlay	Folco
Frulla	Fry
Godfrey	Goodale
Graham	Harvard
Harvey	Hubbard
Jackson	Jennings
Jordan	Karetak-Lindell
Karygiannis	Keyes
Knutson	Kraft Sloan
Lastewka	LeBlanc
Lee	Leung
Lincoln	Longfield
MacAulay	Macklin
Mahoney	Malhi
Maloney	Marcil
Marleau	Martin (LaSalle—Émard)
McCallum	McGuire
McKay (Scarborough East)	McLellan
Mills (Toronto—Danforth)	Minna
Mitchell	Murphy
Myers	Nault
Neville	O'Brien (London—Fanshawe)
O'Reilly	Pacetti
Pagtakhan	Paradis
Parrish	Patry
Péric	Peschisolido
Peterson	Pettigrew
Phinney	Pickard (Chatham—Kent Essex)
Pillitteri	Pratt
Price	Proulx
Provenzano	Redman
Reed (Halton)	Regan
Robillard	Saada
Savoy	Scott
Sgro	Shepherd
Speller	St-Jacques
St-Julien	St. Denis
Steckle	Szabo
Telegdi	Thibault (West Nova)
Thibeault (Saint-Lambert)	Tirabassi

Tonks
Ur
Whelan

Torsney
Vanclief
Wilfert — 134

PAIRED

Members

Asselin
Cauchon
Coppes
Gagnon (Champlain)
Grose
Lancôt
Matthews
Perron
Roy
Stewart

Bergeron
Coderre
Fournier
Girard-Bujold
Kilgour (Edmonton Southeast)
Martin (LaSalle—Émard)
McCormick
Rocheleau
Simard
Tremblay — 20

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Bakopanos): I declare the amendment to the amendment lost.

[*English*]

The next question is on the amendment.

Ms. Marlene Catterall: Madam Speaker, I believe you would find consent in the House to apply the vote just taken to the amendment now before the House and apply the same vote in reverse to the motion to concur in the Senate amendment.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Bakopanos): Is it agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

(The House divided on the amendment, which was negated on the following division:)

(*Division No. 158*)

YEAS

Members

Abbott
Anderson (Cypress Hills—Grasslands)
Bailey
Bigras
Borotsik
Breitkreuz
Cardin
Casson
Clark
Crête
Davies
Desjarlais
Doyle
Forseth
Gagnon (Lac-Saint-Jean—Saguenay)
Gaudet
Goldring
Grewal
Guay
Harper
Herron
Hill (Prince George—Peace River)
Jaffer
Keddy (South Shore)
Laframboise
Lill
Lunney (Nanaimo—Alberni)
Martin (Winnipeg Centre)
McDonough
Meredith
Mills (Red Deer)
Nystrom
Pallister
Picard (Drummond)
Rajotte
Reynolds
Robinson
Schmidt

Ablonczy
Bachand (Saint-Jean)
Benoit
Blaikie
Bourgeois
Cadman
Casey
Chatters
Comuzzi
Dalphond-Guiral
Day
Desrochers
Duceppe
Gagnon (Québec)
Gallant
Gauthier
Gouk
Grey
Guimond
Harris
Hill (Macleod)
Hinton
Johnston
Kenney (Calgary Southeast)
Lalonde
Loubier
Marceau
Masse
Ménard
Merrifield
Moore
Obhrai
Paquette
Plamondon
Reid (Lanark—Carleton)
Ritz
Sauvageau
Skelton

Solberg
Spencer
Stinson
Thompson (New Brunswick Southwest)
Toews
Wasylycia-Leis
White (Langley—Abbotsford)
Williams

Sorensen
St-Hilaire
Strahl
Thompson (Wild Rose)
Vellacott
Wayne
White (North Vancouver)
Yelich — 92

Speaker's Ruling

NAYS

Members

Adams
Allard
Assad
Augustine
Barnes (London West)
Bélaïr
Bellemare
Bertrand
Binet
Bonin
Boudria
Brown
Bulte
Caccia
Caplan
Castonguay
Charbonneau
Collenette
Cullen
DeVillers
Discepola
Drouin
Easter
Eyking
Finlay
Frulla
Godfrey
Graham
Harvey
Jackson
Jordan
Karygiannis
Knutson
Lastewka
Lee
Lincoln
MacAulay
Mahoney
Maloney
Marleau
McCallum
McKay (Scarborough East)
Mills (Toronto—Danforth)
Mitchell
Myers
Neville
O'Reilly
Pagtakhan
Parrish
Péric
Peterson
Phinney
Pillitteri
Price
Provenzano
Reed (Halton)
Robillard
Savoy
Sgro
Speller
St-Julien
Steckle
Telegdi
Thibeault (Saint-Lambert)
Tonks
Ur
Whelan

Alcock
Anderson (Victoria)
Assadourian
Bagnell
Beaumier
Bélaïr
Bennett
Bevilacqua
Blondin-Andrew
Bonwick
Bradshaw
Bryden
Byrne
Calder
Carroll
Catterall
Chrétien
Cotler
Cuzner
Dion
Dromisky
Duplain
Eggleton
Farrah
Folco
Fry
Goodale
Harvard
Hubbard
Jennings
Karetak-Lindell
Keyes
Kraft Sloan
LeBlanc
Leung
Longfield
Macklin
Malhi
Marcil
Martin (LaSalle—Émard)
McGuire
McLellan
Minna
Murphy
Nault
O'Brien (London—Fanshawe)
Pacetti
Paradis
Patry
Peschisolido
Pettigrew
Pickard (Chatham—Kent Essex)
Pratt
Proulx
Redman
Regan
Saada
Scott
Shepherd
St-Jacques
St. Denis
Szabo
Thibault (West Nova)
Tirabassi
Torsney
Vanclief
Wilfert — 134

Speaker's Ruling

PAIRED

Members

Asselin	Bergeron
Cauchon	Coderre
Copps	Fournier
Gagnon (Champlain)	Girard-Bujold
Grose	Kilgour (Edmonton Southeast)
Lancôt	Martin (LaSalle—Émard)
Matthews	McCormick
Perron	Rocheleau
Roy	Simard
Stewart	Tremblay— 20

Proulx	Provenzano
Redman	Reed (Halton)
Regan	Robillard
Saada	Savoy
Scott	Sgro
Shepherd	Speller
St-Jacques	St-Julien
St. Denis	Steckle
Szabo	Telegdi
Thibault (West Nova)	Thibault (Saint-Lambert)
Tirabassi	Tonks
Torsney	Ur
Vanclief	Whelan
Wilfert— 135	

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Bakopanos): I declare the amendment lost.

The next question is on the motion.

(The House divided on the motion, which was agreed to on the following division:)

(Division No. 159)

YEAS

Members

Adams	Alcock
Allard	Anderson (Victoria)
Assad	Assadourian
Augustine	Bagnell
Barnes (London West)	Beaumier
Bélair	Bélangier
Bellemare	Bennett
Bertrand	Bevilacqua
Binet	Blondin-Andrew
Bonin	Bonwick
Boudria	Bradshaw
Brown	Bryden
Bulte	Byrne
Caccia	Calder
Caplan	Carroll
Castonguay	Catterall
Charbonneau	Chrétien
Collenette	Cotler
Cullen	Cuzner
DeVillers	Dion
Discepola	Dromisky
Drouin	Duplain
Easter	Eggleton
Eyking	Farrah
Finlay	Folco
Frulla	Fry
Godfrey	Goodale
Graham	Harvard
Harvey	Hubbard
Jackson	Jennings
Jordan	Karetak-Lindell
Karygiannis	Keyes
Knutson	Kraft Sloan
Lastewka	LeBlanc
Lee	Leung
Lincoln	Longfield
MacAulay	Macklin
Mahoney	Malhi
Maloney	Marcil
Marleau	Martin (LaSalle—Émard)
McCallum	McGuire
McKay (Scarborough East)	McLellan
McTeague	Mills (Toronto—Danforth)
Minna	Mitchell
Murphy	Myers
Nault	Neville
O'Brien (London—Fanshawe)	O'Reilly
Pacetti	Pagtakhan
Paradis	Parrish
Patry	Péric
Peschisolido	Peterson
Pettigrew	Phinney
Pickard (Chatham—Kent Essex)	Pillitteri
Pratt	Price

Abbott	Ablonczy
Anderson (Cypress Hills—Grasslands)	Bachand (Saint-Jean)
Bailey	Benoit
Bigras	Blaikie
Borotsik	Bourgeois
Breitkreuz	Cadman
Cardin	Casey
Casson	Chatters
Clark	Comuzzi
Crête	Dalphond-Guiral
Davies	Day
Desjarlais	Desrochers
Doyle	Duceppe
Forsyth	Gagnon (Québec)
Gagnon (Lac-Saint-Jean—Saguenay)	Gallant
Galloway	Gaudet
Gauthier	Goldring
Gouk	Grewal
Grey	Guay
Guimond	Harper
Harris	Herron
Hill (MacLeod)	Hill (Prince George—Peace River)
Hinton	Jaffer
Johnston	Keddy (South Shore)
Kenney (Calgary Southeast)	Laframboise
Lalonde	Lill
Loubier	Lunney (Nanaimo—Alberni)
Marceau	Martin (Winnipeg Centre)
Masse	McDonough
Ménard	Meredith
Merrifield	Mills (Red Deer)
Moore	Nystrom
Obhrai	Pallister
Paquette	Picard (Drummond)
Plamondon	Rajotte
Reid (Lanark—Carleton)	Reynolds
Ritz	Robinson
Sauvageau	Schmidt
Skelton	Solberg
Sorenson	Spencer
St-Hilaire	Stinson
Strahl	Thompson (New Brunswick Southwest)
Thompson (Wild Rose)	Toews
Vellacott	Wasylycia-Leis
Wayne	White (Langley—Abbotsford)
White (North Vancouver)	Williams
Yelich— 93	

PAIRED

Members

Asselin	Bergeron
Cauchon	Coderre
Copps	Fournier
Gagnon (Champlain)	Girard-Bujold
Grose	Kilgour (Edmonton Southeast)
Lancôt	Martin (LaSalle—Émard)
Matthews	McCormick
Perron	Rocheleau
Roy	Simard
Stewart	Tremblay— 20

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Bakopanos): I declare the motion carried.

Mr. Roger Gallaway: Madam Speaker, I rise on a point of order. With respect to the main motion, which I understood to be the third motion, I wish to be recorded as being present and voting against it.

Mr. Dan McTeague: Madam Speaker, I wish to be recorded as voting in favour.

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Bakopanos): It being 6:37 p.m., the House will now proceed to the consideration of private members' business as listed on today's Order Paper.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

[*Translation*]

APPOINTMENT OF JUDGES

Mr. Richard Marceau (Charlesbourg—Jacques-Cartier, BQ) moved:

That the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights study the process by which judges are appointed to Courts of Appeal and to the Supreme Court of Canada.

He said: Madam Speaker, it is with great pleasure that I rise to begin debate on Motion No. 288 which I have the honour to sponsor and which I had the honour of introducing in the House.

I would be remiss if I did not express my happiness with the recent changes in our rules of procedure that will allow this motion to be voted on at the end of the debate.

In fact, it was regrettable that a number of important issues, some as important as and some even more important than government motions presented to this House, were not subject to debate and especially to a vote in this House.

In our system of government, I believe it is equally important for members of all parties, including the opposition, to cause the other hon. members to state their opinions on issues of concern to them. Therefore, I want to stress the importance of this new way of proceeding in the House, which cannot help but better reflect the institution's democratic nature.

For the benefit of my hon. colleagues and the audience in the public galleries and at home, I would like to repeat the actual words of my motion, which is quite simple. It reads as follows:

That the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights study the process by which judges are appointed to Courts of Appeal and to the Supreme Court of Canada.

It is not complicated; it is simple and direct. There is no partisan intent in it. That is why I ask my hon. colleagues to listen carefully to the reasons behind this motion.

As the hon. members know, there is an old principle in English law, in the common law, that justice must not only be done, it must be seen to be done. The purpose of this principle, the very foundation of our justice system, is to maintain the highest possible level of public confidence in the judiciary. The current process of appointing judges, however, is in direct conflict with this principle, and clouds the image of justice.

There are many examples to support this statement. Two relatively recent cases are of particular interest and I would like to share them with the House.

Private Members' Business

Last summer, the Prime Minister appointed Justice Michel Robert, who had served on the Quebec Court of Appeal since 1995, to the position of chief justice for Quebec. This is a very important position, if ever there was one, in Quebec's judicial system.

The Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada announced, on August 8, the appointment of the Honourable Marie Deschamps, a judge of the Quebec Court of Appeal, to the Supreme Court of Canada.

These two individuals are, no doubt, preceded by an enviable legal reputation, which therefore surely justifies their appointment to such important positions. However—since justice must be seen to be done—it is reasonable to wonder, as members—and the general public will not hesitate to make its views known—whether their appointment has anything to do with their commitment to the Liberal Party of Canada or their connections to the latter.

• (1835)

Members are no doubt aware that Justice Robert presided over the Liberal Party of Canada from 1986 to 1990 under John Turner and contributed, apparently, to his fall. The Prime Minister would therefore have good reason to reward him. Bear this in mind.

Justice Marie Deschamps is the spouse of Paul Gobeil, former minister under Robert Bourassa's Liberal government in Quebec from 1985 to 1989, who still has ties to the Quebec Liberal Party.

These two examples seem to show or at least clearly suggest politicization of the courts. In today's society, this politicization or this appearance of politicization, even a hint of it, can seriously jeopardize the public's respect for the courts and the judiciary.

If we consider the important role of the courts today, particularly given their greater duties, if only due to appeals related to the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, or their involvement in the evolution of various social debates such as same-sex marriage, aboriginal claims and the decriminalization of marijuana, we must avoid at all costs any association between the judiciary and the political arm.

All the more so because these judges, who are not elected as we know, make decisions which have an increasing impact on the creation of public policy in Canada and sometimes go beyond what Parliament might have wished.

This is an argument of some weight in favour of a review and democratization of the process of appointing judges, which unfortunately some will surely criticize. But we must resist and we must hold this debate. It is very likely that the public will back us up on this, on our position that the entire matter needs to be looked into, and I trust that my colleagues in the Liberal Party over there, particularly those backing the member for LaSalle—Émard in the race to succeed the Prime Minister, will do likewise.

Private Members' Business

I am making a solemn appeal to my colleagues across the way. Let them keep their eyes and ears open and especially let them not jump to a conclusion too hastily. I hope that the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice whom I see here, and with whom I had the opportunity to work on the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights, will not take a dogmatic stand and will instead agree to a serious study, as we had moreover in connection with same-sex partners, an issue of equal importance for Canada.

I would like to remind him, and all members of the Liberal Party that the hon. member for LaSalle—Émard said the following in his speech to the students of the University of Toronto's prestigious Osgoode Hall:

—we should reform the process surrounding government appointments. The unfettered powers of appointment enjoyed by a prime minister are too great... Such authority must be checked by reasonable scrutiny conducted by Parliament in a transparent fashion... To avoid paralysis, the ultimate decision over appointments should remain with the government. But a healthy opportunity should be afforded for the qualifications of candidates to be reviewed, by the appropriate standing committee, before final confirmation.

The member for LaSalle—Émard could not be any clearer about the importance he assigned—and I trust still does, but we shall see whether he sticks to his opinion when it comes to the vote—to having a more democratic and more transparent process.

At the time he was referring to senior public servants, to ambassadors.

• (1840)

None of these senior positions that he would like to subject to parliamentary review, none of these ambassadors or senior officials, will have as much impact on public policy as appeal court judges or judges of the Supreme Court of Canada.

We could go on at great length about the current appointment processes for provincial and territorial superior court judges, for Federal Court judges, or for judges at the Tax Court of Canada, because there are specific criteria that must be filled for these appointments.

However, as members know, when it comes to appointments to appeal courts and to the Supreme Court, subjectivity reigns. In fact, there is no clear and precise process in place for the appointment of these judges.

The entire process is left to the discretion of the Prime Minister, with input from the Minister of Justice. It is strange that appointments to lower judicial appointments are more structured than appointments to these higher courts, such as the appeal courts and the Supreme Court.

The purpose of the motion I have moved is to refer to the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights the mandate of studying the issue and reporting the findings of our consultations and deliberations to the House. I am not asking anyone to take a stand or to take any position at this point. I am simply asking members to keep an open mind and to allow the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights to look into the details of this issue.

It is possible that once we have looked into this matter, we may find that it is preferable to leave the situation as is, or that a reform of judicial appointments to the highest Canadian courts is advisable.

We must not shy away from this debate. We must put it all out on the table. Let us look at it and study the situation without any predetermined ideas.

This is a substantive issue that is critical for the old common law principle that I mentioned in my introduction, regarding justice and the appearance of justice. It is up to us as parliamentarians to promote public confidence in our institutions and this mission must include our legal system.

We could just quote a number of articles published in newspapers, which clearly show what the public thinks of the current process. In *La Presse* of June 28, 2002, Yves Boisvert commented on the appointment of Michel Robert in an article entitled "Patronage Appointment".

On June 29, 2002, *The Gazette* published an editorial under the headline "Who's to Judge". I encourage my hon. colleagues to read these articles. There is also an article published in the *National Post* on July 2, 2002, admonishing, "Don't politicize courts". Then there was the *London Free Press*, asking parliamentarians to "Review the Appointments".

We can see from these various editorial policies that the public is worried, that it would like a process that is more transparent, which would assure the people of Quebec and Canada that the nominees to positions as appeal or supreme court judges are not appointed because of their connections to the ruling political party.

In closing, I urge all the members of this House, and those from the government party in particular, to allow parliamentarians to examine this question, and not take a position right away. Let us examine the question. Give us parliamentarians this opportunity to review the process to ensure that judges are not treated as politicians and that there is an opportunity to consider the appointments.

• (1845)

[*English*]

Mr. Vic Toews (Provencher, Canadian Alliance): Madam Speaker, I thank the member for bringing forward the motion. It is something that I certainly will be supporting. I know that the member brought forward the motion on a non-partisan basis; however, there must be some alternatives that the member is considering without committing to any particular alternative.

Perhaps he could outline some of the ideas that perhaps the justice committee could consider. There are various alternatives, including a review of Supreme Court of Canada candidates by an independent committee, elections and terms. With past experience as a member of a cabinet in a provincial government, I know that whenever those ideas have been raised in the past, the bar associations and the law societies immediately attacked any suggestion of change as being somehow an interference with the independence of the judiciary.

Unfortunately I think that this is a little shortsighted given the changes that have happened in the legal landscape with the changes to the charter and indeed in the area of federalism. I know that my colleague sitting as a member for the Bloc would be very concerned about who is judging the powers of the federal government vis-à-vis the province. I think that if we had a system that in fact addressed those kinds of concerns and was truly impartial, perhaps we could make this Confederation work a little better.

Private Members' Business

•(1850)

[*Translation*]

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Bakopanos): Given the fact that there are two other members who wish to ask questions, it will be five minutes.

[*English*]

May I suggest that hon. members on the list to speak perhaps could make their comments during the course of their ten minutes so as to allow other members. It is a suggestion from the Chair.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Richard Marceau: Madam Speaker, thank you for your suggestion. Nevertheless, my hon. colleague for Provencher has asked an excellent question that deserved to be raised. Of course, he knows very well what I think about federalism. No doubt, he knows that my political goal is not to improve the Canadian federation but to get out of it.

That said, he is, in fact, right about the various hypotheses raised. Furthermore, a member from his party had raised a very similar question in a debate I took part in a few weeks ago.

Yes, there are several possible avenues, such as having an independent tribunal consider the qualifications of appointees. The Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights could very well do this. Parliamentarians could be asked to play a role.

As to the popular argument that if changes are made to how judges are appointed, this will take away from the judiciary's independence and its appearance of independence in Canada, I think that the complete opposite is true. Now, people wonder when a former president of the Quebec wing of the Liberal Party of Quebec gets appointed. Rightly or wrongly, they wonder already.

In closing, since I know that many members want to ask questions, I want to emphasize that the doubt in people's minds does more harm to the judiciary in Canada, which has an increasingly important role in defining our public policies, than another more impartial, independent and, at the very least, non-partisan process would.

[*English*]

Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.): Madam Speaker, one of the examples the member gave was that of Madam Marie Deschamps' appointment. He concluded that her credentials spoke for themselves and justified her appointment, but he went on to make a case that the fact she is married to someone who is involved in politics should somehow taint her appointment to the judiciary.

Does the member not believe that even women who are married to politicians should have an opportunity to pursue their goals to the fullest without being somehow tainted by association?

[*Translation*]

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Bakopanos): The hon. member for Charlesbourg—Jacques-Cartier has the floor, but we are nearly out of time.

Mr. Richard Marceau: Madam Speaker, the hon. member is right in saying that Madam Deschamps has excellent credentials.

Nevertheless, there are doubts in certain minds and that is what must be eliminated.

I am sure that, had there been another process, had it not been left solely to the Prime Minister's discretion, Madam Justice Deschamps would very likely still have been appointed to the Supreme Court. There would not, however, have been that doubt in people's minds, because it would have been seen as an impartial and independent decision.

•(1855)

[*English*]

Mr. Paul Harold Macklin (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, Lib.): Madam Speaker, it is a pleasure to be allowed to speak on this motion brought forward by the hon. member for the Bloc Québécois.

The importance of a strong judiciary to Canadian society cannot be overemphasized. There is a growing recognition that stability, human security and the rule of law are necessary for a society which is economically viable and which protects human rights. As the guardians of the rule of law, judges form an important part and a pillar of our social order.

The need for further study of the appointment process for federally appointed judges has not been demonstrated. This process is well known and has served the Canadian public very well. I would like to take this opportunity to examine how the appointments process for federally appointed judges contributes to the maintenance of a strong judiciary by securing judges of the highest calibre.

The federal judicial appointments process has been in place since 1988 and is administered by the Commissioner for Federal Judicial Affairs. The process applies to those interested in submitting their candidacies for appointment to the superior courts, including appointment to the provincial and federal courts of appeal.

The statutory qualifications for appointment are 10 years at the bar of a province or a combination of 10 years at the bar of a province and service in a judicial office. Under the federal judicial appointments process, qualified lawyers and those holding office as provincial and territorial court judges may apply to the commissioner for appointment to a superior court. Additionally, candidates may also be nominated by members of the legal community or by other interested persons or organizations. In these cases the commissioner will contact each nominee to confirm his or her interest in being considered for judicial appointment.

This process is the very means by which qualified candidates from historically under-represented communities are identified for possible appointment to superior court. All candidates complete an extensive personal history form that canvasses matters such as the name of the bench they want to join and why, and an assessment of their strengths and weaknesses for the position.

Private Members' Business

Because the government is fully committed to ensuring that the full diversity of all communities is well represented on the superior court bench, candidates, at their option, may also self-identify if they belong to an ethnic, minority, aboriginal or disabled group. The completed forms are forwarded by the commissioner to the appropriate provincial or territorial advisory committee. The applications for judicial appointment are assessed by these independent advisory committees.

Advisory committees are a key element of the federal appointments process and are comprised of seven individuals drawn from the bench, the bar and the general public on the following basis: a nominee of the provincial or territorial law society; a nominee of the provincial or territorial branch of the Canadian Bar Association; a judge nominated by the chief justice of the province or territory; a nominee of the provincial attorney general or territorial minister of justice; and three nominees of the federal Minister of Justice.

The federal nominees are selected for their ability to represent the public interest and at least two of them may not be practising lawyers. The provincial attorneys general and territorial ministers of justice are encouraged to choose their nominees on a similar basis. Each member is appointed by the Minister of Justice to serve an unpaid term of two years. There is a possibility of a single renewal. Lawyer members of the committees cannot themselves be candidates for judicial appointment for one year following their term of office. Regionally based committees have been established in Ontario and Quebec because of the large populations in these provinces.

● (1900)

Advisory committees confirm the candidate's credentials with legal and other sources. They assess the candidates' professional competence and experience, personal characteristics, social awareness, including sensitivity to gender and racial equality, and any potential impediments to that appointment. The assessment is a rigorous one, designed to identify persons suited both by temperament and ability to preside over the superior and appellate courts of this country.

The committee makes an assessment of each candidate and will make one of the following determinations: that the candidate is recommended, or highly recommended, or that the committee cannot recommend the candidate for federal judicial appointment. Of course unsuitable candidates would fall in this last category. When a candidate is deemed recommended or highly recommended, that person will be included in a bank of approved candidates from which the Minister of Justice may make a recommendation to cabinet for appointment.

The appointments process has been highly successful in producing judges of the greatest quality and distinction. Indeed, Canadians are envied around the world for the quality, commitment and independence of their judiciary. For many people in other parts of the world, our Canadian courtrooms, presided over by judges who are efficient, impartial and free from government or any other interference, represent a shining ideal that is hoped for but not yet realized.

Canada's experience and expertise has been sought in the development of judicial and court systems in such diverse countries and regions as the former Soviet Union and the eastern bloc

countries, including the Ukraine and Kosovo, as well as South Africa and China.

There is ample evidence that the federal judicial appointments process is working very well in fostering a judiciary of exceptional distinction. The process does not need further study. In fact, it is my position that the expertise and time of the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights would be better directed to other issues of a more pressing nature.

For all of these reasons, I do not support the motion. However, I wish to thank all hon. members for their attention today on this important issue.

Mr. Vic Toews (Provencher, Canadian Alliance): Madam Speaker, I am pleased to address this motion today by my colleague from the Bloc, the hon. member for Charlesbourg—Jacques-Cartier. As we have heard, the motion asks the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights to study the process by which judges are appointed to courts of appeal and to the Supreme Court of Canada.

The parliamentary secretary outlined the process. As impressive as it sounds, it is remarkable that in the vast majority of cases the decisive criteria is the fact that the candidate has very close connections to the governing party. It has been the Liberal Party for some time. I dare say if we took a list of all the candidates who have been appointed, those Liberal connections would come very clearly.

I do not know whether that is simply coincidence but it reminds me a lot of the story about the emperor not having any clothes. We have gone through this charade of saying that this is the careful process we follow in selecting our nominees. We get all these nominees together in one big pile and then out of that pile, we magically pick the ones with the Liberal connections. We all know they are all well qualified but the overriding qualification is either the Liberal membership or the connection with the Liberal Party. I would challenge members opposite to take a look at these credentials. That is the truth of the matter. Let us not pretend that the emperor has clothes when he has no clothes.

I am pleased to support this motion. The Canadian Alliance has long held that since non-elected judges exercise so much influence on the laws passed by elected officials, the process of appointing them requires more openness.

Indeed in the past 20 years since the event of the charter, the responsibility for making moral, cultural and indeed political decisions has fallen out of the hands of Parliament and into the hands of the non-elected judiciary. As a result, the judiciary currently exercises substantial political power. At the same time, politicians have become increasingly more reluctant to advance legitimate political initiatives, putting increasingly more power into the hands of a selected few.

I would invite my colleagues to read the editorial today in the *Ottawa Citizen* dealing with the entire issue of marriage. The *Ottawa* editorial has come out very clearly in saying that this is not an issue for judges to determine. This is a matter, a social policy issue for Parliament to determine, yet we see courts unilaterally usurping the power of Parliament.

We see often the defenders of the judiciary say that they are only exercising the power we have given them. That is nonsense. It is like hiring a contractor to build a two or three bedroom bungalow, then coming back and finding a house that does not meet the standards or is completely different. Yet the contractor says that he has been hired to do this and that it is time to pay, with no one else to correct the mistake that has been made.

Once empowered, judges are virtually unaccountable in our democratic system. We need to ensure that those who are appointed are people who reflect the values and the cultures of all Canadians.

Look at the Charter of Rights. When the charter first came in, we heard the courts say that the powers and freedoms in the Charter of Rights could not be examined in a vacuum. We had to look at the cultural background and the historical political context. Yet we see the courts drifting away from that context.

● (1905)

Judges in Canada have taken on a greater role in shaping government policy, an area, as I have said, that had been reserved for elected officials.

In some cases this role has had a positive effect, such as the protection of minority and equality rights. In other cases, such as the Sharpe decision, the child pornography case, the effect has had detrimental effects on our society and our ability to protect the most vulnerable in our society, our children.

One case that has resulted in numerous problems in our immigration system is the 1985 court decision called Singh. In this case the Supreme Court of Canada extended the Charter of Rights and Freedoms to anyone setting foot on Canadian soil.

While most Canadians would agree that non-citizens and refugees must be entitled to certain legal rights, such as the right to a fair trial, I would say the indisputable right to enter into and remain in Canada should be reserved for citizens and landed immigrants. This is certainly the approach that has been adopted by western civilized democracy. Extending that right to everyone has opened the door to abuse, to dangerous terrorists and other violent criminals looking to find a safe haven in Canada. Unfortunately, this kind of unilateral approach by the courts jeopardizes the safety and security of all law-abiding Canadians, be they citizens, landed immigrants or potential refugees.

Other examples include the recent decision of the Supreme Court of Canada giving the right to prisoners to vote. Convicted murderers now enjoy the same rights that veterans who fought for this country enjoy in terms of the right to vote.

By the court substituting its own political opinion for that of elected parliamentarians, Canadians will lose faith in the democratic process, in the legitimacy of democratic government and the rule of law.

All these examples illustrate that because of the important decisions our judges are called upon to make many people in Canada believe that the closed door process, the real process for choosing judges, controlled by the Prime Minister, should be changed. In fact Canadian Alliance policy specifically calls for

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Supreme Court of Canada judges being chosen by a multi-party committee of the House of Commons after open hearings.

Others would like to go further. In fact recent surveys by Environics indicate that two-thirds of Canadians believe that Supreme Court of Canada judges should be elected.

Regardless, I strongly believe that the closed door process for choosing Supreme Court of Canada judges and appeal court judges is in need of review. Although the Prime Minister does consult with interest groups such as law societies, bar associations and individual members of the legal community, as well as other judges, when it comes to making these appointments, given the significance of court decisions since the advent of the charter, it is increasingly necessary for those appointments to come before Parliament in some fashion so that a broader spectrum of Canadians is involved in that decision by reference to parliamentarians' input.

I am not fixed on any particular way but this is a wonderful opportunity for the justice committee to examine the process. My colleague, the parliamentary secretary, has indicated it is a wonderful process. Let us look at the process. Let the parliamentary committee look at the process and see what is happening. If it is a good process, the process will stand the light of day and it will stand scrutiny.

I see no problem in supporting this very thoughtful and well written motion.

● (1910)

Hon. Lorne Nystrom (Regina—Qu'Appelle, NDP): Madam Speaker, I too want to rise in support of the motion by the member for Charlesbourg—Jacques-Cartier. The motion to look at how we appoint judges to the courts of appeal and the Supreme Court of Canada should be accepted by the House.

The process today in general is non-political. It is a process that has given us pretty good courts and judges. However I find it wanting in making it more accountable and more openly democratic in the process.

Some members of the House might not be aware but I spent a lot of years as a member of Parliament on the various constitution committees. I was here for the patriation of the Constitution back in 1981. I did the Dobbie-Beaudoin and the Dobbie, Beaudoin-Edwards round with the Constitution, the prelude to Meech Lake and after Meech Lake. I was also very much of a partisan supporter of the Meech Lake accord. One part of that accord dealt with the selection of supreme court justices and it tried to make them better reflect our federation.

This is one problem we have today. The Supreme Court judges are appointed by the Prime Minister and the federal government. When it comes to adjudicating a dispute between a province and the federal government, there is a feeling in many provinces that this may not be a fair way of doing it in terms of the referee, because they are adjudicating between a federal and provincial dispute.

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Under Meech Lake there was a mechanism where, if I recall correctly, the provinces would select a number of people to recommend to the minister of justice. The minister of justice would choose judges from the group selected by the provinces. In the province of Quebec, for example, the Government of Quebec would suggest a short list of names and the federal government would choose someone from that short list.

In the rest of the country under the common law, because Quebec judges are under civil law, we had the same thing happen for the Ontario, western and Atlantic judges. The provinces would suggest a list to the federal government and it would select from that list. I supported that at the time along with a lot of other people in the House from all political parties.

That is one way of doing it and I would certainly be open to looking at it. However the motion does not talk about a specific way of selecting our judges. It just says that we would have a process where the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights would study the process by which judges were appointed. That is a very commendable thing to do.

I would be opposed to the election of judges, as is the case in some jurisdictions like the United States. I would not want to see the politicization of the process where judges run for office. I certainly would not be very supportive of that.

Another way of doing it is to have the federal government choose from a short list that it is provided by a non-partisan body, which we have in some courts today. Instead of making the appointment, the federal government would make the nomination. That nomination would then go to the justice committee for ratification or rejection. That might be something we should look at very seriously as well. It would force the federal government to be more careful about who it would nominate because the nominee would have to go through a ratification process at the justice committee. That is one way of perhaps democratizing the process. The other way is what we did in Meech Lake and we could look at that as well. Another way is by having advisory committees which now basically select judges for some of the lower courts. We could apply that to the Supreme Court as well. That is also another way of doing it.

The main thing here is that it is important that we have a judiciary system in Canada that is divorced from politics, that is fair, that is just and where we get the best possible judges in this country. When we select judges, we have to ensure that we respect the privacy of the candidates, that we maintain the separation of politics from the judiciary and that we take the selection process from behind closed doors into a more open system of clear standards and boundaries, thus maintaining the integrity of the judicial system at the very highest levels. These are some of the things we could consider. The main thing is to get this before a committee.

• (1915)

As a matter of fact, I think one of the roles of Parliament is not being fulfilled as well as it should be. Committees are not being used to the fullest in terms of doing independent studies, making recommendations on how the government of the country should work, making recommendations on how certain people should be appointed.

I have believed for a long time that we need a greater democratization of our country's political system. There is probably no parliamentary system in the world where the prime minister's office or indeed a premier's office, and this is not being partisan as our party has two premiers, have so much power in their own hands to make appointments to important boards and commissions.

In the federal government for example, the prime minister appoints all the senators, Supreme Court justices, the head of the military, the head of the RCMP, the head of the CBC, the head of every important agency and board of the Government of Canada. He appoints all the cabinet ministers and appoints all the parliamentary secretaries. In the case of the government from time to time it even appoints candidates over the heads of local riding associations.

We have gotten away from a more democratic system. We should look at the democratic deficit in Canada. Part of that is how we appoint justices to our courts. Part of it is how we organize this place and make this place more relevant and meaningful.

I have found after my many years in Parliament that the most frustrated parliamentarians are government backbenchers. They are very frustrated with the process. At least in the opposition we can get up very freely and liberally and express our point of view, ask questions in the House, make statements that are critical of the government if we feel it is going the wrong way. However a government backbencher becomes in effect a political eunuch in terms of being silenced by our system.

I have seen this in Saskatchewan with the backbench NDP MLAs where our party has been in government for most of the time since 1944. It does not matter what the party is, we have a political system that I believe is not as democratic as it should be.

Why for example, should we not have a system where committees could set their own timetables? Why should we not have a system where committees could introduce legislation? Why do we have to have so many confidence votes? Almost everything that we vote on is a confidence vote. We should have very few confidence votes except for the basic budgetary program and plan of the Government of Canada.

I remember very well when Margaret Thatcher was at the height of her popularity in Britain. There were many times when Margaret Thatcher had a bill defeated in the House of Commons because the backbenchers in her own party would be in opposition to the government bill.

I remember Tony Blair in the last Parliament when he was extremely popular before his massive re-election lost many votes in the British House of Commons. That did not bring down the government. It provided a healthier debate for the British people.

Why could we not do that in this country? There is case after case after case where government members of Parliament, be they Liberal or Conservative, over the years were in opposition to a certain piece of legislation that the government brought in. However they were not going to bring down the government over a certain piece of legislation and cause an election. It is the system we have.

I have seen it in all parties, at all levels, in every provincial government over the years. It really shortchanges what the Canadian people deserve, which is a free flowing and uninhibited debate of ideas, a clash of ideas, representing one's own constituents and representing them well.

I want to make one reference back to the Trudeau government. I do not want to mention the name because he was a very well liked former minister in the House. He got a patronage appointment to head a crown corporation back in the 1970s. I did not meet a single Liberal MP who agreed that that particular gentleman should head that particular crown corporation, but there was nothing they could do about it because the government made the appointment.

I just do not think it is right in a fair and democratic society that the government should have the power to make nominations. We should refer a lot of them to the relevant committees of the House of Commons.

The Supreme Court is a little different. The Supreme Court, as I said before, adjudicates federal-provincial disputes. It interprets legislation not only at the federal level but at the provincial level. Somewhere in the process there should be input for the provinces.

• (1920)

[*Translation*]

It is not just in the province of Quebec. The province of Quebec is different, unique, a province that is not in the least like the others, in part because of its civil law, among other things. The other provinces, however, must also be involved in selecting judges, and this is very important.

Over the past 20 years, there have been several disputes between the Province of Saskatchewan and the federal government. In my opinion, that is a reason to have provincial input into the selection of judges.

[*English*]

With that, I hope the House will support the motion and the justice committee can do a study as to how we can improve the selection of judges in our country.

Mr. John Herron (Fundy—Royal, PC): Madam Speaker, it is my pleasure to make some remarks today on behalf of our party's justice critic, the member for Pictou—Antigonish—Guysborough, in support of Motion No. 288 which reads:

That the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights study the process by which judges are appointed to Courts of Appeal and to the Supreme Court of Canada.

This is a very measured and very considered motion that affords the opportunity for parliamentarians to discuss this particular issue. The Progressive Conservative Party is in favour of the motion itself.

The motion would have the Standing Committee on Justice and Human Rights study the process by which judges are appointed. This could lead to recommendations on ways to change how judges are appointed to the courts.

In recent years Canadians have become concerned about the appearance that courts have encroached upon the supremacy of the Canadian Parliament by reading into our laws interpretations that appear to be inconsistent with or outside the intent of the laws when

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passed by Parliament. More often than not, we find that is the fault of the legislators and not a misinterpretation by the court itself. It is our duty to ensure the laws are strong and clear.

This has led to a renewed interest in how those who comprise the bench at the appellate level and at the Supreme Court level receive their appointments.

In the last year we have witnessed a number of cases at the Supreme Court level which have in effect seemed to take away from the supremacy of Parliament and seem to contradict the societal values that we hold dear. The most provocative of these is the John Robin Sharpe case. There is also the most recent decision allowing convicted felons the right to vote. The decisions of the court in those two examples stand outside, I would suggest, the interests of Canadians in terms of their societal values and outside the parameters of what the intent of Parliament was in the first place.

For example, Canadians do not understand how the court could allow the potential endangerment of children by allowing the artistic merit defence. That the courts could allow such a travesty goes beyond the rational thought process for Canadians.

All this is to say that scrutiny by members of Parliament of appointees to the highest court could go a long way in determining the suitability of those wishing to serve and could possibly allow for a greater recognition or reflection of present day values.

To many it seems that this reading into the intent of laws by the courts seems to be a violation of the basic constitutional principle that Parliament makes the laws, the executive implements them and the courts interpret them.

The root of this perception of what some individuals deem as judicial activism is the 1982 Constitution Act. It included for the first time in Canada a constitutional entrenchment that guaranteed civil rights through the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, requiring courts to determine the constitutionality of our laws in light of the charter.

Although I categorically support the charter, we all know that there are issues that have become problematic from time to time where the intent of Parliament has had to withstand that particular litmus test. Some have argued that this has allowed an erosion of parliamentary supremacy in which democratic accountability has been replaced by the supremacy of the Constitution as interpreted by the courts.

Should this motion lead to a change in the appointment process, it would ultimately allow for greater public scrutiny and therefore reinforce, I believe, public confidence in the process without jeopardizing judicial independence.

In our democratic reform package we have made a number of suggestions, including the recommendation that the name and qualifications of any person proposed for appointment by the prime minister to the Supreme Court of Canada should be presented to Parliament, which shall, after debate, make a recommendation on the suitability of the nominee's candidacy. This type of directive could also be applied to the appointment of those at the appellate level. A vote in the House of Commons should be conducted and the outcome communicated to the governor in council prior to such appointments being made.

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In the past there has been the suggestion that a special committee be struck to examine those recommended for appointment. There is a need for parliamentary scrutiny and in fact, appearances before a specialized committee, provided the parameters of questions are clearly laid out beforehand. In my opinion this would be appropriate.

● (1925)

This does not mean the committee would have the right to examine the financial records of an appointee or for that matter the financial records of a spouse or a partner. I do not believe this type of information can be seen as having any relevance in terms of the appointee's ability to interpret the law.

This motion is aimed at ensuring the proper representation of Canadian views and values through those members democratically elected to represent Canadians and could provide a unique balance and perspective in the process of judicial appointments.

I see the committee process as an opportunity to allow members of Parliament acting on behalf of their constituents a chance to delve into some of the beliefs of the appointees through previous decisions rendered.

No one, and I believe I am speaking for the member from the NDP, wants to see the American style confirmation hearings, strictly political partisan affairs, which we have seen as in the example of Justice Thomas. I would not be an advocate on a personal basis of having the individuals who ascend to the bench itself be elected. That would clearly politicize the process in a very extraordinary way. However, there are some things we could do from a parliamentary perspective. Anything we do that mitigates the perception that the individuals on our benches have a political element would be a helpful service.

Both the Liberal Party of Canada and the Progressive Conservative Party of Canada have appointed Supreme Court judges in the past. If there is one element where we have actually made sure that we have done it right each and every time, it is at the Supreme Court level. No prime minister, regardless of party stripe, has in my view politicized our most sacred court in the land.

I spoke very briefly about a document that our membership voted on at our national convention in Edmonton in August. At that convention we reviewed a myriad of issues in terms of renewing the country's democratic institutions, issues pertaining to free votes, the roles of Commons committees, codes of ethics for Parliament and a discipline for parliamentarians, the problems with legislative federalism, ensuring that we have the power of the purse so that Parliament actually votes on the estimates as opposed to doing it in one single vote. It is a travesty that we approve the estimates, about \$180 billion, with one vote with no scrutiny to speak of on a committee of the whole basis.

There are opportunities for us to review issues such as Senate reform and correct the wrong that we have in the west. It is clear that western Canada is not represented in the capacity it should be in terms of the respect of its population and the influence that they have in this country.

We have to move to an elected Senate as well and give senators the moral right to make interventions to the degree that they want to,

the legislative authority to do so by being elected, democratically selected individuals.

We talked about issues such as citizen initiatives and referenda, rights for citizens to petition.

These were all issues that we spoke to. However the debate that we have before is the relationship between Parliament and the courts. I would like to read three points which I think would be valuable proposals for Parliament to consider.

First, we propose that Parliament undertake to ensure the maintenance of a proper balance between itself and the courts. We should have a pre-legislation review to ensure that Parliament clearly specifies within each statute the intent of the statute and obtains independent legal advice and charter compatibility of bills before they leave Parliament in the first place.

Second, we propose to establish a judicial review committee of Parliament to prepare an appropriate response to those court decisions which Parliament believes should be addressed through legislation.

Third, we believe that the name and qualifications of any person proposed for appointment by the prime minister to the Supreme Court of Canada should be presented to Parliament which shall after debate make a recommendation on the suitability of that person's nomination.

● (1930)

We do not want to co-opt an American system. When it comes to the Supreme Court perspective, we have it right for the most part.

Mr. James Lunney (Nanaimo—Alberni, Canadian Alliance): Madam Speaker, I would like to commend the member for Charlesbourg—Jacques-Cartier for bringing forth this excellent motion.

It is an issue that Canadians are indeed concerned about. There was a huge public outcry in British Columbia, for example, because judges failed to respond to child pornography with the John Robin Sharpe case and refused to prosecute any child pornography cases. People were outraged because of that.

People have an understanding that it is the role of Parliament to make the laws. It is the role of police to enforce the laws, and it is the role of judges to do the sentencing and to settle disputes where those arise.

I want to commend the member. It is an excellent motion and he will find a lot of support for it. We think there should be a review of the way judges are selected. He was recommending that a committee look at the various options.

I do not know if he will have time to respond, but I wondered if he was also looking at a committee that would review the judges themselves? Was he recommending that the committee would be involved in making recommendations to the House? Finally, was he considering, as one of the options, that members might even consider some of these controversial issues that judges get snarled with if they involve social concerns, and make recommendations to the House so that Parliament would make the decisions and not the judges?

Private Members' Business

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Bakopanos): There is no time for questions or comments.

Mr. James Lunney: There have been so many issues where this judicial activism has gotten out of hand. We see it now in the issue of defining marriage. Recently the courts have been telling Parliament that it needs to change its marriage laws. We have another court in British Columbia coming to the same conclusion, that the government must respond because society has changed. The courts are telling us that society has changed. We recognize that this is not what society expects of judges. It needs to be fixed.

●(1935)

The Acting Speaker (Ms. Bakopanos): The time provided for the consideration of private members' business has now expired and the order is dropped to the bottom of the order of precedence on the Order Paper.

It being 7:35 p.m., the House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 2 p.m. pursuant to Standing Order 24(1).

(The House adjourned at 7:35 p.m.)

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