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OFFICIAL REPORT
(HANSARD)

Wednesday, October 20, 2004

Speaker: The Honourable Peter Milliken

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HOUSE OF COMMONS

Wednesday, October 20, 2004

The House met at 2 p.m.

Prayers

• (1400)

[*English*]

The Speaker: As is our practice on Wednesday we will now sing O Canada, and we will be led by the hon. member for Timmins—James Bay.

[Members sang the national anthem]

• (1400)

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

[*English*]

WORKPLACE FATALITIES

Hon. Roger Gallaway (Sarnia—Lambton, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, every day two Canadians go to work never to return. They are the statistics of workplace fatalities in Canada.

Reducing worker fatalities to a statistic is to forget the human face of people who drive trucks, work on construction sites and in the factories of this country. These are often the people who know the physical and human toll of labour and the dignity of work.

For 20 years now labour groups such as the Teamsters have observed a day of mourning on April 28 for those who have died on the job. Members of the House will soon be able to support the legislative initiative of the member for Sackville—Eastern Shore when we in this chamber are asked to enact a bill requiring the lowering of flags on all federal buildings annually on April 28 in commemoration of workers killed on the job.

Ulysses Grant once quipped, “Labour disgraces no man; unfortunately you occasionally find men disgrace labour.”

The bill would allow us, the members of the House, not to disgrace but to honour those who labour and who sadly are reduced to statistical anonymity.

EDMONTON

Mr. Peter Goldring (Edmonton East, CPC): Mr. Speaker, democracy was exemplified in the arena of election culminating on Monday, October 18 in Edmonton. Ballots were tallied, soon making clear the citizens' choice was for change.

The new mayor of Edmonton is Stephen Mandel, considered to be fiscally responsive, with a keen social conscience for the less fortunate and homeless. Former Mayor Bill Smith who has served Edmonton honourably for three terms failed to elicit sufficient electoral support to continue.

New to council are Linda Sloan in Ward 1, Kim Krushell in Ward 2 and Mike Nickel in Ward 5. They join with nine returning councillors to effect the will of Edmontonians.

Democracy is at work in Edmonton. I extend congratulations to Mayor Mandel and to all new and returning city councillors. Edmontonians are looking forward to enhanced dialogue and improved cooperation among their federal, provincial and municipal governments.

* * *

HOUSING AWARDS

Hon. Maria Minna (Beaches—East York, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am proud to announce today that two of this year's housing award winners, Habitat for Humanity Toronto's “Volk Way” and Frontiers Foundation's “Project Amik” affordable housing in east Toronto, are from my riding of Beaches—East York.

The housing award was established by the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation eight years ago. This year's theme focused on best practices in affordable housing.

Project Amik is a terrific place with 75 units on a rent geared to income basis. Half of the units are rented to Canadian aboriginal people and 14 are dedicated for rental to people with physical disabilities. The Volk Way house saw 61 men, women and children move into 14 new homes where there was once a single bungalow.

The need for safe, affordable shelter is the foundation on which our communities are built. I have always supported affordable housing initiatives and am proud that our government was able to be involved in one of these projects. We have committed to doing more and I look forward to the opportunity to make more announcements like this one as we expand and enhance the affordable housing initiative.

S. O. 31

It is an honour to represent organizations that are helping to provide better living conditions for all in need. I ask—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Lévis—Bellechasse.

* * *

[*Translation*]

LÉVIS-LAUZON CEGEP

Mr. Réal Lapierre (Lévis—Bellechasse, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I wish to congratulate the Lévis-Lauzon CEGEP on its recognition by the Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council's College and Community Innovation Pilot Program.

Theirs was the only Quebec project selected. They were one of 6 award recipients from among the 31 applications submitted Canada wide.

This project will assist in further developing the biotechnology expertise of TransBio Tech, the CEGEP's technology transfer centre, and will benefit businesses in the region's agri-food, biomedical and forestry sectors as well.

This is excellent news for the Chaudière-Appalaches region and proof of the dynamism of the Lévis-Lauzon CEGEP, its staff and its partners.

* * *

• (1405)

[*English*]

MISS WORLD CANADA

Ms. Nancy Karetak-Lindell (Nunavut, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, first, I would like to thank the people of Nunavut for their confidence in me and for the opportunity to represent them for the third time.

I would also like to take this opportunity to congratulate my constituent, Ashley Paniyuk-Dean of Rankin Inlet, Nunavut, who recently made history as the first Inuk and the first Nunavut contestant for the Miss World Canada pageant, which took place in Toronto on September 9, 2004.

A graduate of the Nunavut Sivuniksavut program, Ashley is a young entrepreneur and now attends the teacher training program at Nunavut Arctic College in Iqaluit.

Ashley finished in the top 12 in the Miss World Canada pageant and was voted Miss Heart and Soul, winning the most votes ever in this category. The Miss Heart and Soul award is all the more precious as the winner is voted for by her fellow contestants. Congratulations to Ashley.

* * *

OTTAWA TALENT INITIATIVE

Mr. Gordon O'Connor (Carleton—Mississippi Mills, CPC): Mr. Speaker, today I want to recognize the Ottawa Talent Initiative Action Centre in Kanata. This grassroots organization was started by unemployed high tech workers. OTI's mandate is to create a support network to assist the thousands of unemployed and underemployed high tech professionals in our area.

OTI is working with all levels of government to identify training, funding and support programs designed specifically for tech workers. One area which OTI has identified is the lack of programs to assist small start-up companies with product commercialization. Many laid off workers are trying to start their own businesses. They need assistance to identify viable products and bring them to market. Government expertise could help with this task.

Technology workers are essential contributors to economic growth and we want to keep them here. I applaud OTI for its work and ask all parties in the House to support efforts to return high tech workers to sustainable employment.

* * *

ABORIGINAL AFFAIRS

Ms. Anita Neville (Winnipeg South Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, just over two years ago I attended the groundbreaking ceremony at Norway House for a new school.

Just over two weeks ago, on September 22, I returned to attend the opening of the Helen Betty Osborne Ininew Education Resource Centre. This state of the art school houses almost 1,300 students from nursery school age to the senior 4 level. The school has the latest in technology and equipment and will ensure that the students will have the very best educational experience. It also houses a health office and a dental clinic.

It is most appropriately named after the late Helen Betty Osborne, a young aboriginal woman from Norway House whose dream to be a teacher was tragically ended.

I congratulate the chief and band council of the Norway House Cree Nation and all those associated with the planning, funding and construction of this most wonderful school.

* * *

[*Translation*]

JOYEUX RETRAITÉS DE LONGUEUIL

Ms. Caroline St-Hilaire (Longueuil—Pierre-Boucher, BQ): Mr. Speaker, this year a Longueuil seniors' organization, Les Joyeux retraités de Longueuil, turns 25 years old.

The group has organized numerous activities to celebrate their silver jubilee. This past Sunday, I had the pleasure of attending one of these events, a musical evening featuring the group Nos voix, nos visages and singer Michel Louvain.

This organization provides its 1,700 members aged 50 and up with opportunities to socialize through numerous activities, among them volunteering in the organization of major sports activities in the area and visiting homes for the aged with their choir in order to brighten the residents' day.

Since my election in 1997, I have had the opportunity to meet a number of the Joyeux retraités and to attend their activities regularly. I have seen their commitment to and their generosity toward the population of Longueuil, and I can tell you that their motto "Still young at heart" suits them to a T.

Today I would like to take this opportunity to thank them for all the joy they have brought to people over the past 25 years and wish them many more years of doing so.

* * *

[English]

YOUTH VOTERS

Ms. Helena Guergis (Simcoe—Grey, CPC): Mr. Speaker, there is a general opinion that young people do not vote because they are apathetic. I am of the opinion that most young people do care, and are choosing not to vote because the current system is not connected with them and is failing to represent their views. After all, they vote for their favourite contestant on *Canadian Idol*, but they do not vote to pick a prime minister.

Perhaps if they knew what a prime minister does, what Parliament does and how government connects and works with people throughout the community, they would see how they fit into the picture.

High school students in my riding of Simcoe—Grey have the opportunity of experiencing what it is like to be a member of Parliament. Students will volunteer in my office as student MPs. The goal is to encourage youth to become involved in politics and to provide an opportunity for students to understand the job of a member of Parliament.

Participation will work toward the community service hours students are required to do.

I am pleased to announce the name of Simcoe—Grey's first student MP. Her name is Sherry Cailles. She attends CCI in Collingwood. Sherry is a bright young lady who recently attended the World Affairs Seminar in Whitewater, Wisconsin. I look forward to working with her.

* * *

● (1410)

CANADIAN LIBRARY WEEK

Hon. Sarmite Bulte (Parkdale—High Park, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to inform the House that from October 17 to October 25 the Canadian Library Association will be celebrating Canadian Library Week.

Each province will celebrate this week in their own unique way. Libraries will be holding all manner of events to raise the awareness of the services available at one's local library.

Local libraries contribute to a higher quality of life in our communities through their promotion of literacy and in providing greater access to information for all Canadians. There are six public libraries in my riding, including the historic Swansea Public Library which was a gift to the community in commemoration of the veterans of World War I. Another library in my riding, the Parkdale Library, also houses a community information centre. This library also serves as a venue for many community events.

I would like to thank the libraries for the important role they play in our communities and in all our cities. I wish them every success with this year's Canadian Library Week.

S. O. 31

VETERANS AFFAIRS

Mr. Deepak Obhrai (Calgary East, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure and an honour to rise today in the House to pay tribute to more than 1,600 Albertans who served as air servicemen and women during the second world war.

Canada played a pivotal role during the war, using Canadian air bases to train 131,000 airmen and women from around the world.

On September 3 a 19 foot high statue of a uniformed airman was unveiled at McDougall Centre in Calgary. It is a fitting tribute to those who fearlessly gave their lives in the defence of this country.

I want to thank the former MP, Mr. Art Smith, a Calgary businessman, who was the driving force behind the establishment of this monument. His efforts to honour the memory of those who gave their lives and the families and relatives of those lost during World War II is a testimony to his devotion to public service. Calgarians and all Albertans say thanks to Art.

* * *

NAVY APPRECIATION DAY

Hon. Keith Martin (Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, allow me to rise to pay tribute to our navy, both uniformed and civilian personnel, on this Navy Appreciation Day.

Brave and reliable, our navy personnel react quickly and decisively to our needs, both at home and abroad. They performed superbly during the first gulf war, were quick to respond to the attacks of September 11 and have performed magnificently in the war against terrorism.

In addition, they have the best shipboarding teams in the world. When disaster strikes, our navy plays an essential role in multinational operations and also in providing humanitarian assistance.

May I send a big thanks from Parliament to our navy personnel and their families. They deserve our recognition and profound gratitude for the work they have done and continue to do to make our world a safer place for all.

* * *

[Translation]

CO-OP WEEK

Ms. Nicole Demers (Laval, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the 79,000 employees, 25,000 leaders and 7.5 million members of co-ops and mutual associations in Quebec are celebrating co-op week.

In Quebec, there are some 3,200 of these businesses, generating \$19 billion in sales. The cooperative movement is a driving force in Quebec and an important ally in its economic and social development.

Also, 75% of jobs in non-financial cooperatives are in the regions. Cooperatives have a survival rate twice that of other businesses. The cooperative system never ceases to amaze with its capacity to adjust to the changing needs of the populations it serves. In the current context of demographic development and globalization, this system represents a sustainable solution.

Oral Questions

Long live the cooperative movement, particularly the Coopérative de soutien à domicile de Laval and the Coopérative de développement régional Montréal-Laval.

* * *

• (1415)
[English]

SPONSORSHIP PROGRAM

Mr. David Anderson (Cypress Hills—Grasslands, CPC): Mr. Speaker,

In '95 during the fall
When the PQ cast a pall,

The PMO said, "Stand Tall!
We'll go to the wall—
There'll be money for all!
You don't have to crawl—
Just give us a call".

And so, Mr. Speaker, some had a ball
Collecting cash, what a haul!

And so it went well...all in all
Until it hit the fan (or the wall).

Word got out. "We have to stall!
Hide the stuff, no one will fall".

"I'm mad as hell!" we heard in the hall.
"I knew nothing at all.
And what I do, I can't recall!"

Now it turns out he's had a ball.
A million dollars—that's quite a haul!
Well, old fundraisers, we helped them all.

But the question remains—and please don't stall
—who really made the call?
Was it Paul?

* * *

TOMMY DOUGLAS

Mr. Jack Layton (Toronto—Danforth, NDP): Mr. Speaker, on October 20, 1904, Tommy Douglas entered the world and set about changing it.

[Translation]

Today marks the 100th anniversary of the birth of Tommy Douglas, and I am honoured to salute his memory.

[English]

As the first premier in our party's history, he brought public medicare to the people of Saskatchewan. As the first leader of the NDP and an MP in the House, he helped expand that victory to all Canadians in a minority Parliament that worked.

Tommy Douglas modernized Saskatchewan with roads, water, telecommunications and electricity. He humanized Canada with his passion and ideas.

Fourteen years before John Diefenbaker, Tommy Douglas passed a bill of rights.

[Translation]

His commitment to these rights led him to take a stand against the War Measures Act, a brave step that inspired me to join this party.

[English]

A smiling bust of him sits in my office, reminding me that this place can make life better for people.

On behalf of a grateful nation, we remain awed by Tommy's courage and touched by his compassion. Let us be guided by his words, "Courage, my friends, 'tis never too late to make a better world".

ORAL QUESTION PERIOD

[English]

SPONSORSHIP PROGRAM

Hon. Stephen Harper (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister has been asked 585 questions on the sponsorship scandal this year. He has maintained he knew nothing, he saw nothing and he did nothing, except that we now know his office placed calls to secure sponsorship money for his fundraiser, money that funnelled through Groupe Everest.

When did the Prime Minister learn that his office had made these calls?

Right Hon. Paul Martin (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, as has been explained in the House, Mr. Justice Gomery is dealing with this issue, and the commission certainly will deal with it.

What the Gomery commission cannot deal with is the evolving position of the Leader of the Opposition on Belgium. Let me just simply say this. First he wants to cohabit with the Bloc. Then he wants to cohabit with Mario Dumont. Now we learn that he wants to do it with the both of them in a bed and breakfast in Brussels.

Hon. Stephen Harper (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Judge Gomery, unless the Prime Minister is planning to give up his seat, cannot come here and answer for the Prime Minister's behaviour on the floor of the House.

The Prime Minister said that he was out of the loop on the sponsorship scandal, but apparently his staff were in the loop. They knew exactly whom to contact to get money for his Liberal fundraiser friends.

When did the Prime Minister know his office was placing calls to Alfonso Gagliano to get sponsorship money?

Hon. Scott Brison (Minister of Public Works and Government Services, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have reminded the hon. members opposite not to prejudge Gomery by commenting on day to day testimony for a very important reason. That is to respect the independence of a judicial inquiry. However, there is another reason why it is important. That is to save them from themselves and to prevent them from making the grievous errors that their leader did yesterday when he made false allegations on the floor of the House of Commons. That is the risk he is taking and they are taking when they comment on day to day testimony without the full report.

Oral Questions

Hon. Stephen Harper (Leader of the Opposition, CPC): Mr. Speaker, apparently these questions finally got the government to answer outside the House of Commons. If the government is prepared to tell us who made the calls, I want to find out when the Prime Minister learned. I will ask again in French if it will help.

[*Translation*]

We now know when the office of the Prime Minister placed calls to Alfonso Gagliano to get sponsorship money for his fundraiser friend and who placed these calls.

Now, when did the Prime Minister know these calls were being placed from his office?

• (1420)

Right Hon. Paul Martin (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, all the answers will be in the report of the Gomery commission, and the Leader of the Opposition knows it.

What we want to know is who is advising the Leader of the Opposition on constitutional matters, Tintin and Snowy?

[*English*]

Mr. Peter MacKay (Central Nova, CPC): Mr. Speaker, obviously the Prime Minister was not looking in the mirror when he said last spring, “anyone who knows anything...should come forward and not wait to be compelled to do so”. In a case of do as I say, not as I do, the Prime Minister refused to follow his own advice. Now we know his staff routinely made calls looking for sponsorship money and hid this information from a parliamentary committee.

When did the Prime Minister know that calls were made and why did it take a judicial inquiry for Canadians to find out that the Prime Minister's staff and his invisible hand were guiding the sponsorship program?

Hon. Scott Brison (Minister of Public Works and Government Services, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, two days ago the deputy leader of the Conservative Party said that Francis Fox was on the board of Internationaux du Sports de Montréal. He was wrong. Yesterday the leader of the Conservative Party said that the Prime Minister personally made calls. He was wrong.

That right-wing party seems to be wrong a lot of the time. I would urge the Conservative Party to fire its research staff and to support the work of Justice Gomery. That would be the right thing to do.

Mr. Peter MacKay (Central Nova, CPC): Mr. Speaker, one columnist said that the testimony at the Gomery commission is “a Liberal Party mired in patronage, political interference and yes, corruption”.

Three witnesses have said that the sponsorship program was initially kept secret and only Liberals knew about it. The rules for the program were written after the media requested it, years after the program began. Political direction was given to public servants and were told to use Liquid Paper to blank out certain names. Now we learn the Prime Minister's staff was involved in directing the program.

My question is for the Prime Minister. What has his staff whited out?

Hon. Scott Brison (Minister of Public Works and Government Services, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I fear that the hon. member may be wrong yet again.

I have a letter here addressed to the former minister of public works from my good friend Elsie Wayne, a former senior member of the Conservative Party, in the year 2000, seeking funding from the sponsorship program.

The folly of commenting on day to day testimony of a judicial inquiry is that one runs the risk of being wrong. I am surprised they do not break limbs jumping to conclusions on that side of the House.

* * *

[*Translation*]

PETRO-CANADA

Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Finance can say what he likes about following objective criteria, it is still true that Desjardins Securities was excluded from the sale of Petro-Canada shares in a cavalier fashion.

If the federal government acted as properly as the finance minister claims, why did the Prime Minister tell Alban D'Amours, president of the Desjardins Group, that he was sorry, if, indeed, the federal government did all it was supposed to?

Right Hon. Paul Martin (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, there is no doubt that the Minister of Finance followed the proper procedures with enormous integrity, exactly as he was supposed to.

I think that all Quebecers and all Canadians recognize the importance of the cooperative movement and the role Desjardins plays in it, as well as its role both inside Canada and in less-developed countries. The growth of the cooperative movement in Canada is something I have always recognized and shall continue to recognize.

Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, it might also be interesting if the federal government were to recognize that movement when it is time to do business, and not just pay lip service to it. When the Minister of Finance has the nerve to call this transaction one of the “single most successful transactions of its kind in the last decade in the western world”, I would like to remind him that Quebec is also a part of the western world.

It is the best vehicle for selling shares in Quebec, and Quebecers have been excluded from buying Petro-Canada. That is what was done, the same way André Ouellet tried to use Bill S-31 to prevent Quebec from buying shares in Canadian Pacific. That is what happened.

• (1425)

[*English*]

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the hon. gentleman is simply mistaken.

[*Translation*]

I am proud to salute the work of the team that was created and also emphasize the fact that this transaction was an opportunity for companies from one end of the country to the other to show their talents, in particular, two Quebec companies, the Banque Nationale and Casgrain.

Oral Questions

Mr. Yvan Loubier (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot, BQ): Mr. Speaker, it is interesting to see that most of the brokerage firms chosen by the government have contributed money to the Liberal Party of Canada. RBC Dominion Securities contributed \$117,000, BMO Nesbitt Burns \$79,600, while GMP Securities contributed \$51,000 to the Prime Minister's leadership campaign. There is only one important exception: the Desjardins Group did not make a contribution to the Liberal Party of Canada.

Did the Minister of Finance have the contributions to the Liberal Party in mind yesterday when he said that all the companies had been chosen according to objective criteria?

[English]

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have no knowledge whatsoever of what the corporations contribute.

However I want to tell the hon. gentleman that in order to secure the very best results, we first consulted thoroughly with the Department of Justice to make sure all the rules were complied with. Second, we consulted with senior officials in the Department of Finance with long experience in these matters. Third, we went entirely outside the government to get two independent experts to verify to us that the pattern we were following was precisely proper in the context of the transaction.

[Translation]

Mr. Yvan Loubier (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot, BQ): Mr. Speaker, that is too bad. If he consulted the Department of Justice, the choice available to the government is even better today. One of the firms chosen under the Minister of Finance's objective criteria is UBS Security, which had to pay a \$2 million fine, one of the biggest fines ever paid, for questionable trading practices. That must have been quite the consultation at the Department of Justice.

How does the minister explain choosing UBS Security over Desjardins, the largest brokerage firm in Quebec and, as a result, denying numerous Quebec investors the opportunity to buy Petro-Canada shares?

[English]

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Minister of Finance, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, unfortunately, in the context of this transaction, it was not possible to include every conceivable worthy applicant. We included 22 very worthy applicants. Unfortunately, it was not possible to include everyone. We did include Casgrain and the Banque Nationale.

I want to tell the hon. gentleman that we went outside the circle of the government to get professional independent advice so that I could absolutely assure myself that the transaction was conducted properly. That advice came from a former governor of the Bank of Canada and a former auditor general.

* * *

GOVERNMENT POLICIES

Mr. Jack Layton (Toronto—Danforth, NDP): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Prime Minister.

On his recent foreign trip, foreign leaders had to point out to the Prime Minister that he had not kept his promise on foreign aid.

Students, meanwhile, of course know that he has not kept his promise on student debt. People trying to breathe clean air know that he has not kept his promise on pollution control. Cities know that he has not kept his 5¢ promise and the result is property taxes are going up.

Will the Prime Minister give an undertaking that he will keep all his promises before he starts to reduce taxes?

Right Hon. Paul Martin (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, let me simply tell the hon. leader of the NDP that we are keeping our promises on cities. I would quickly remind him of the \$7 billion on GST over the next 10 years alone.

We have increased every single year the amount of money that we are putting into foreign aid. I would remind him of the very important role that Canada is playing with the most heavily indebted countries in the world.

I would ask the hon. member to take a look at the amount of money that we have put in terms of the municipalities and the environment, and the fact that the Minister of Finance has committed over \$1 billion to go into environmental technologies from the sale of Petro-Canada.

Let me assure the hon. member that we are keeping our promises.

• (1430)

Mr. Jack Layton (Toronto—Danforth, NDP): Finally, Mr. Speaker, in this House I get to say that this so-called GST promise to the cities, this giving of money to the cities, is the government not taking money from the cities. That is what it is.

I am just trying to understand this House. What we have here is an opposition leader who wants to separate English from French and we have a Prime Minister who wants to separate words from action.

Why is it that the Prime Minister has an infrastructure minister who is crying poor when he has a finance minister who says his pockets are full of our money?

Right Hon. Paul Martin (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have gone across this country, as has the minister who is in charge of cities and communities and infrastructure. I have met with the people in small towns and with the mayors of the biggest cities. In every single meeting they have praised the government for the \$7 billion that they will be receiving over the next 10 years.

Let me just say that if I have to choose between the judgment call of the leader of the NDP and the mayors, the reeves and the wardens of this country, I will choose the mayors, the reeves and the wardens.

* * *

[Translation]

SPONSORSHIP PROGRAM

Mr. James Moore (Port Moody—Westwood—Port Coquitlam, CPC): Mr. Speaker, when it comes down to it, what Canadians want to know about the sponsorship scandal is whether the Prime Minister is or is not responsible. The facts are fuel for speculation.

Oral Questions

Yesterday, his assistant at the time admitted to having requested over \$1 million in funding for his organizer, Serge Savard. Did she do so on her own, or at her boss's behest? Is the Prime Minister now going to disavow any connection with this?

[English]

Hon. Scott Brison (Minister of Public Works and Government Services, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister has been extremely accountable, which was why he ended the sponsorship program and commissioned Justice Gomery to do his work.

I urge hon. members opposite to support Justice Gomery and not to prejudge Justice Gomery, because it is an independent judicial inquiry. They would also do themselves a favour by not making grievous errors on the floor of the House of Commons on a daily basis.

Mr. James Moore (Port Moody—Westwood—Port Coquitlam, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister is being so open he cannot even answer a question in the House of Commons. Canadians want to hear from the Prime Minister, not from the minister of public sell-outs.

We know the Prime Minister's Office intervened to support a \$1 million grant for his friend, Serge Savard. We know that Mr. Savard turned around and raised \$1 million for the Prime Minister's leadership. Only the guilty hide.

When did the Prime Minister know that his office was calling to secure money for his millionaire finance raiser?

The Speaker: The hon. member for Port Moody—Westwood—Port Coquitlam knows well that making up fictitious names for ministers is not helpful for order in the House. While some may be amused by names, I am sure others are not, and it only creates disorder to do that.

I assume he was referring to a particular minister but of course I have no idea, but if he was, I hope he would use the proper nomenclature in future. I believe the hon. Minister of Public Work and Government Services will answer the question.

Hon. Scott Brison (Minister of Public Works and Government Services, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I think the hon. member was perhaps referring to a speech I gave on September 21 when I talked about the strategic direction for the future of the public works department, which is a very positive direction. It involves new approaches to procurement, real property and IT, all aimed at providing better value for Canadian taxpayers and better services for Canadians.

I would urge the hon. member to get involved and get engaged in a positive debate about the future of our department, and to let Justice Gomery do his work.

Mr. Monte Solberg (Medicine Hat, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is a fact that the Prime Minister's Office staff lobbied the sponsorship program for money for Serge Savard who in turn raised a bunch of money for the Prime Minister. It is also a fact that the Prime Minister said that he wanted anyone who knew anything about this to come forward.

Well, here is his chance. Why does he not come forward right now and tell us what he knew and when he knew it with regard to his own staff lobbying the sponsorship program for Serge Savard?

Hon. Scott Brison (Minister of Public Works and Government Services, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, yesterday they were making the same type of error over there by accusing the Prime Minister of making calls on behalf of individuals. Today maybe they are wrong again. We will not know until we have Justice Gomery's report.

We are not afraid to have the full report because we are not afraid of the truth here in this government and we are looking forward to that report.

Again, I would urge the hon. members to discontinue prejudging the work of Justice Gomery by commenting on testimony and by making errors on a daily basis because after a while it gets embarrassing on all sides of the House.

● (1435)

Mr. Monte Solberg (Medicine Hat, CPC): Mr. Speaker, when the Prime Minister lets his little helper answer these questions instead of answering them for himself, he makes a mockery of his own commitment to get to the bottom of this.

Why will the Prime Minister not meet the standards that he set for everybody else back when he was mad as hell about the sponsorship program? Why will he not meet those standards right now and tell Canadians directly, here and now, what he knew and when he knew it with regard to his own staff lobbying the sponsorship program to get money for his fundraiser?

Hon. Scott Brison (Minister of Public Works and Government Services, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is with great pleasure that I rise today in the House to provide a little help to the opposition. In fact, I want to point out the important work being done by the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Works who has done the most extensive procurement review in this country since 1963.

That procurement review will provide exceptional value for the Canadian taxpayer and better services for Canadians. I am proud of the work that he is doing and the work the Department of Public Works is doing.

I would urge the hon. members opposite to become involved in this exciting future vision for the department and not to continually focus on the past.

[Translation]

Mr. Michel Guimond (Montmorency—Charlevoix—Haute-Côte-Nord, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister's defence that it is up to the Gomery commission to receive the testimony relating to the sponsorship scandal collapsed yesterday. Although the PM has been questioned five times in this House, after yesterday's oral question period someone from his office revealed to the press the identity of the individual in his office who called Gagliano's office.

Since the Prime Minister himself admitted during the election campaign that there was indeed political involvement in the sponsorship program, I ask again, who was behind that political involvement in the sponsorship program?

*Oral Questions**[English]*

Hon. Scott Brison (Minister of Public Works and Government Services, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the advice that I have provided very graciously to the members opposite in the Conservative Party also applies to members of the Bloc. Both parties have intervener status at the Gomery inquiry and are participating and being supported during that process. We are supporting Gomery. We are providing a tremendous level of openness, transparency and information to Gomery, including cabinet documents to 1994.

We are not afraid of Mr. Gomery's work and we are looking forward to Justice Gomery's report.

[Translation]

Mr. Michel Guimond (Montmorency—Charlevoix—Haute-Côte-Nord, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the investigation carried out in 2000 revealed, after the fact, that certain ministers intervened in the sponsorship program.

I ask the Prime Minister, which ministers?

[English]

Hon. Scott Brison (Minister of Public Works and Government Services, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, when one really considers what the Prime Minister has done to ensure that we get to the bottom of this issue, I think the hon. member is being petty and partisan.

Canadians want this Parliament to work and, whether a minority Parliament or not, they are depending on us to make this Parliament work. I would expect all members of Parliament to be constructive and focused on seeking the right solutions for Canadians. That is what Justice Gomery is doing, so why do we not support him?

* * *

*[Translation]***CANADA ELECTIONS ACT**

Ms. Pauline Picard (Drummond, BQ): Mr. Speaker, according to some unofficial information, the government might amend the Canada Elections Act and take a step backward by once again allowing companies to provide funding to political parties beyond the annual limit of \$1,000, despite the undesirable effects of such a measure.

Will the Prime Minister pledge to leave the Canada Elections Act in its present form and confirm that it is out of the question to go back to a system allowing contributions from friends, who then become entitled to certain favours, as we saw with the brokers retained for the sale of Petro-Canada shares?

Hon. Mauril Bélanger (Deputy Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Minister responsible for Official Languages, Minister responsible for Democratic Reform and Associate Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, when Parliament passed Bill C-24 on election financing, it provided for a statutory review following the tabling, in the House, of the recommendations of the chief electoral officer, which are expected early in the new year.

At that time, the act that was passed will be reviewed, as provided in the legislation.

● (1440)

Ms. Pauline Picard (Drummond, BQ): Mr. Speaker, if the government wants to improve the Canada Elections Act, would it not be preferable, instead of changing the rules on political party financing, to review the appointment process for the positions of returning officers, which currently benefits Liberal friends?

Hon. Mauril Bélanger (Deputy Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Minister responsible for Official Languages, Minister responsible for Democratic Reform and Associate Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I should mention that the statutory review was suggested by the committee itself and approved by Parliament.

As regards returning officers, the government asked the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs to examine the issue and make recommendations to the government. We are waiting for these recommendations.

* * *

*[English]***SPONSORSHIP PROGRAM**

Mrs. Diane Ablonczy (Calgary—Nose Hill, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister will not answer straight questions because he cannot defend the fact that his word has been broken time and time again. He pledged to cooperate fully with Parliament's investigation into the sponsorship scandal. He said:

—the government will ensure that every single piece of information and every fact on this matter are made public as quickly as possible.

Shame on him. His government failed to comply with about half of the committee motions requesting pertinent documents.

Why did the Prime Minister withhold vital information until the election was safely behind him?

Hon. Scott Brison (Minister of Public Works and Government Services, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the government has responded to all requests for information from both the public accounts committee and from the Gomery commission commensurate with the authorities of each and consistent with the laws of the land. We are aiming to and continuing to cooperate fully with both bodies.

Mrs. Diane Ablonczy (Calgary—Nose Hill, CPC): Mr. Speaker, withholding relevant documents from Parliament has nothing to do with the Gomery inquiry. It is a question of the Prime Minister's contempt for our committee and for members of this House.

The Prime Minister made a clear pledge to make all documents public. He did not. He promised to cooperate fully with the investigation of the parliamentary committee. He failed to keep that promise.

Is it not just a little too convenient that the most damaging evidence of Liberal skulduggery in the sponsorship mess was not released until after the election?

Hon. Scott Brison (Minister of Public Works and Government Services, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, in fact, my department has responded to over 20 requests from the public accounts committee and will continue to respond to further requests as they come in from the public accounts committee as it continues its work.

The Prime Minister has made a decision that cabinet documents back to 1994 will be made available. This is why the information commissioner is lauding the Prime Minister and the government, and recognizing that openness and transparency is a priority for this government.

* * *

CANADA POST

Mr. Brian Pallister (Portage—Lisgar, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Deloitte Touche audit revealed that former president André Ouellet spent over \$2 million on lavish hospitality and travel. The Prime Minister's inaction since that time speaks volumes about his real commitment to accountability.

The report was delayed until after the election. He did not fire André Ouellet, he actually had to resign. The only action the Prime Minister has taken is to hire his own crony to assume the new chairmanship. If it were any other Canadian but André Ouellet, it would have been different rules.

Why does the government have two sets of rules, one for Liberals and one for everyone else?

Hon. John McCallum (Minister of National Revenue, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, that is absolute nonsense. Mr. Ouellet resigned with no severance pay whatsoever on September 23—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order, please. The hon. minister was asked a question and I know the hon. member for Portage—Lisgar, who does have a supplementary, will want to hear the answer. We need a little order.

Hon. John McCallum: Mr. Speaker, action is certainly being taken. Following Mr. Ouellet's resignation on September 21, the chair of the board of Canada Post wrote again to Mr. Ouellet to request the receipts.

As I have already informed the House, the Canada Revenue Agency is in the process of conducting an audit of the expenditures surrounding the office of the president. Action is indeed being taken.

•(1445)

Mr. Brian Pallister (Portage—Lisgar, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am sure we will all shed a tear for that lack of severance pay.

The minister said there is a single purpose audit being done, but it is obvious that the single purpose of the audit is to ensure Canadians do not get to the truth on this issue.

The fact of the matter is that André Ouellet would not have spent \$2 million on lavish hospitality and travel if it had been his own money. It was not his money. It was the Canadian public's money. The Canadian public deserves some clear answers to some straightforward questions.

Where is their money? When do they get it back?

Hon. John McCallum (Minister of National Revenue, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I can only repeat the very firm actions that are in the process of being taken. The chair of Canada Post has again written to Mr. Ouellet requesting the receipts on September 21. The Canada Revenue Agency is in the process of conducting an audit

surrounding the expenses of the president's office going back to the year 2000. Those are clear actions.

* * *

FEDERALISM

Mr. Mark Holland (Ajax—Pickering, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, on the opposite side of the House we have a separatist party that wants to rip Canada apart and we have an official opposition that wants to turn it into Belgium. The leader of the official opposition wants to convert Ottawa to Brussels, and give all federal powers to unaccountable and unelected institutions that will segregate linguistic communities.

My question is for the hon. Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs. Can the minister comment on the opposition leader's scheme to undermine our great federation?

Hon. Lucienne Robillard (President of the Queen's Privy Council for Canada and Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the proposal of the leader of the official opposition is not clear to his own caucus and all Canadians. He seems to want all francophones in this country to speak with one voice and the same for anglophones without dissension. This is not the reality of Canada.

This scheme is a very complicated one and one with a lot of unanswered questions. This government, this Prime Minister, and this party believes in a strong Canada that respects linguistic duality and diversity, and—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Skeena—Bulkley Valley.

* * *

THE ENVIRONMENT

Mr. Nathan Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley, NDP): Mr. Speaker, in 1993 the Prime Minister promised to cut greenhouse gas emissions by 20% by 2005. The reality is that we are dead last in the industrialized world even behind the likes of George W. Bush. So much for Liberal promises.

Now the Liberals are promising more far away action instead of action today. They are getting \$2.6 billion from the sale of Petro-Canada. The clean technology that will cut pollution is already available in this country.

Will the environment minister stand up today and commit to investing 100% of these proceeds into Canada's green economy?

Hon. Stéphane Dion (Minister of the Environment, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member very much for his question and I will discuss this with the Minister of Finance. The Government of Canada is committed to Kyoto and for climate change. We want to go ahead with action and that is what we are doing.

* * *

VIA RAIL

Mrs. Bev Desjarlais (Churchill, NDP): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the transport minister.

When the government admitted that it was \$7 billion off on its budget line, one has to wonder why the promised funding for VIA Rail was cancelled.

Oral Questions

Why is the transport minister silent on support for VIA Rail? Where is the government's commitment to passenger rail which is so crucial in meeting commitments to transport, rebuilding cities and communities, and to the Kyoto accord?

[Translation]

Hon. Jean Lapierre (Minister of Transport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, on Sunday, I will be meeting with members of VIA Rail's board of directors. Together, we will discuss future projects. They will submit an action plan, which I will be pleased to present to the government.

* * *

[English]

NATIONAL DEFENCE

Mr. Gary Lunn (Saanich—Gulf Islands, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canada's new Cormorants are once again grounded. Why? Cracks in the tail rotor.

This government's policy over the last decade has been to cut military funding at every opportunity. This is the second time this year that cracks in the tail rotor have grounded this aircraft.

We would like to know how serious is this problem and specifically, what resources has the government allocated to fix this problem?

• (1450)

Hon. Bill Graham (Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the air force is treating this matter very seriously. As a precautionary matter, the Cormorant fleet will only be flying essential SAR operations as mandated, but this is only a precautionary measure.

I have spoken with the military today. It is working with the manufacturer of the helicopter. It is still under warranty. This is a matter of a recently delivered machine. We are working closely with the manufacturer to address all and any problems that arise. The military is approaching this extremely seriously and with great responsibility.

Mr. Gary Lunn (Saanich—Gulf Islands, CPC): Mr. Speaker, with respect to funding, there is a study that has been released showing that Canada is at the bottom of 169 nations with respect to military funding, half of the average NATO nations.

Even when the Cormorants are cleared to fly, they require 22 hours of maintenance for every hour in the air. That is more than three times what was originally estimated.

Why is the military being forced to pay millions of dollars more in maintenance for a brand new aircraft at a time when the government has left its pockets empty?

Hon. Bill Graham (Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I totally reject the hon. member's preface in his question.

I am proud to say that in terms of total defence spending, that is total money spent on our military, Canada ranks in the top 10 of NATO and the top 20 of the world. This is a record to be proud of, not to be denigrated by members from the other side of the House.

We are working with the manufacturer of the helicopter to ensure that we get the best equipment for our troops, as we do in every area in which we operate.

[Translation]

BROADCASTING

Mr. Rahim Jaffer (Edmonton—Strathcona, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of Canadian Heritage maintains that no ministerial influence is being exerted on the CRTC. It has been confirmed that both the Minister of Intergovernmental Affairs and Ms. Scherrer broke the rules and met with the president of the CRTC.

Were these just social meetings or were they used to influence the decisions about CHOI-FM?

Right Hon. Paul Martin (Prime Minister, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, first, the ministers who met with the president of the agency did so at the president's request. Furthermore, they discussed the agency's broad parameters. They did not discuss any specific case.

Mr. Rahim Jaffer (Edmonton—Strathcona, CPC): Mr. Speaker, on Thursday, the Minister of Canadian Heritage proclaimed her innocence, but that same day, she fussed over the CBC's content. The next day, it was the Minister of Foreign Affairs who was selling off Canadian television audiences to Italian politicians.

When will Liberal ministers stop their manipulation and censorship of public broadcasting? When will Canadians finally be free to choose?

Hon. Liza Frulla (Minister of Canadian Heritage and Minister responsible for Status of Women, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I think that Canadians are free to choose. With the CRTC, we have one of the best broadcast regulating systems. That said, the CRTC is an independent agency. It is now and always will be. However, that does not prevent the ministers responsible from meeting the presidents of their agencies to discuss their needs or simply their roles.

* * *

HOUSING

Mr. Christian Simard (Beauport—Limoilou, BQ): Mr. Speaker, with respect to social housing, Quebec and the federal government are negotiating the transfer of affordable housing and co-op units built before 1994. The Quebec minister, Jean-Marc Fournier, estimates that Quebec is also entitled to compensation at least equal to 24% of the federal investments in this sector, in view of the federal government's withdrawal in 1994.

Does the federal government intend to meet Quebec's requests by transferring not only responsibility for social housing but also the money that goes with it?

[English]

Hon. Joe Fontana (Minister of Labour and Housing, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, my critic's question is very important, and he would know that Quebec and Canada have signed phase two of the affordable housing agreement. In fact, Quebec is doing some absolutely incredible things in partnership with communities and in partnership with the Government of Canada with regard to affordable housing.

On his question with regard to social housing, I and my counterpart in Quebec are negotiating for the social housing transfer. We hope that we can come to an agreement fairly soon because in fact we believe that the Quebec government can deliver social housing along with the Government of Canada.

• (1455)

[Translation]

Mr. Christian Simard (Beauport—Limoilou, BQ): Mr. Speaker, is the minister aware that, because of the loss of revenue suffered by Quebec, there is a need to catch up in social housing? Consequently, when the transfer takes place, does he intend to compensate Quebec in full for its losses?

[English]

Hon. Joe Fontana (Minister of Labour and Housing, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, again let me assure the House and this particular member that negotiations are taking place with the minister of housing in Quebec. Our goal is to work in partnership not only with Quebec but with all the provinces to make sure we can deliver affordable housing to those people in need. We have a commitment from the Prime Minister and from the government that we intend to work with communities and provinces to finally deliver some homes to the most needy in our country.

* * *

ETHICS

Mr. Jeremy Harrison (Desnethé—Missinipi—Churchill River, CPC): Mr. Speaker, today we learned that the public service is being trained in ethics by a former senior RCMP member who was convicted of fraud in 2002. Maybe the Prime Minister will start sending his federal cabinet to similar ethics courses. I can see it now: "How to win friends and influence people 101", taught by Alfonso Gagliano.

When will this government admit it does not know the first thing about ethics, taught by fraudsters or otherwise?

Hon. Reg Alcock (President of the Treasury Board and Minister responsible for the Canadian Wheat Board, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order, please. The President of the Treasury Board has the floor.

Hon. Reg Alcock: Mr. Speaker, a contract was let in May 2003 for instructors for the school. There has been an issue identified with one of the instructors. The irony of it is certainly not lost on me. I can tell the hon. member that we are looking into it. I have ordered that the payment on the contract be stopped. I will report back to the House when I have all the details.

Oral Questions

REPRODUCTIVE TECHNOLOGIES

Mr. Rob Merrifield (Yellowhead, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the government says it is opposed to human cloning, but last year at the United Nations, Canada abstained from a vote on the issue. This week it has another chance. The United Nations is again going to debate the resolution to ban all forms of human cloning.

Will the government continue to say no at home but something different at the United Nations, or will it say no to human cloning?

Hon. Ujjal Dosanjh (Minister of Health, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Canadian law is very clear. We are committed to opposing all forms of human cloning, and we will take positions internationally that are consistent with our domestic policies.

* * *

[Translation]

OFFICIAL LANGUAGES

Hon. Don Boudria (Glengarry—Prescott—Russell, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, francophones living in minority situations and nearly all Canadians are outraged by the opposition leader's declaration, in his so-called Belgian plan, that he wants to see territorial unilingualism in Canada.

Is the Minister responsible for Official Languages prepared to reassure the Canadian people that the Government of Canada is fully committed to the Official Languages Act and that it will say no to territorial unilingualism in Canada?

Hon. Mauril Bélanger (Deputy Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Minister responsible for Official Languages, Minister responsible for Democratic Reform and Associate Minister of National Defence, Lib.): Indeed, Mr. Speaker, what the Leader of the Opposition proposes looks like a situation in which only French would be spoken in Quebec, and no English whatsoever, while in the other provinces, except New Brunswick perhaps—who knows—only English would be spoken and no French at all. That is territorial unilingualism.

Let us be clear. Like the governments of Wilfrid Laurier, Louis Saint-Laurent, Pearson and Chrétien, this Prime Minister's government will never abandon the official language minority communities, wherever they are in the country.

* * *

[English]

NATIONAL REVENUE

Mr. Myron Thompson (Wild Rose, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I received a very distressing call from one of my constituents who has not received his payroll remittance forms from Revenue Canada due to the strike. He was informed that if he failed to drive into Calgary, about 200 miles, and produce his payment he would be charged with a significant interest penalty.

André Ouellet probably will not be charged. Will the Minister of National Revenue do the right thing and assure all Canadians they will not be charged or penalized due to job action taken by the employees of Revenue Canada?

Oral Questions

•(1500)

Hon. John McCallum (Minister of National Revenue, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I think the hon. member makes a good point. I received this information yesterday afternoon. I can tell him that my office is working diligently on the matter and we will get back to him as soon as possible.

* * *

NATIONAL SECURITY

Mr. Brian Jean (Fort McMurray—Athabasca, CPC): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Prime Minister.

The oil sands of northern Alberta account for billions of dollars in this economy. They account for 40% of the oil production in this country and are the largest oil reserve in the western world.

The Prime Minister's own security adviser has warned him that the energy sector in Canada is a primary target for terrorists. The director of CSIS has also clearly stated that this government is not doing enough to protect our energy sector.

Since the Prime Minister cannot seem to follow the advice of his own advisers, what is it going to take for him to start taking note of and protecting the 70,000 people who work—

The Speaker: The hon. Deputy Prime Minister.

Hon. Anne McLellan (Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, in fact the government takes the protection of critical infrastructure of all kinds in this country very seriously, which is why we are working with the provinces, local governments and the private sector to develop a national strategy around the protection of critical infrastructure.

Let me say that in fact we have released a consultation paper in this regard. The province of Alberta, where the oil sands are largely present, is working very constructively with us in terms of ensuring that critical energy infrastructure is protected in this country.

* * *

[Translation]

GUARANTEED INCOME SUPPLEMENT

Mr. Marcel Gagnon (Saint-Maurice—Champlain, BQ): Mr. Speaker, in the Speech from the Throne, the government states that seniors have earned the right to be treated with dignity and that, as one step, it will increase the guaranteed income supplement for the least well-off seniors.

Ought the government not to first do the right thing and pay back to those seniors the \$3.2 billion stolen from them over 10 years, and then raise the GIS?

[English]

Hon. Tony Ianno (Minister of State (Families and Caregivers), Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure to rise and answer the question of the hon. member. He knows, as we have spoken earlier, that the government is very committed to ensuring that all senior citizens who are eligible for guaranteed income supplements get what they deserve. This government is working hard to ensure everyone is aware of it and we will continue to do so, as we promised in our

election platform, to ensure that senior citizens who deserve guaranteed income supplements will get an increase.

* * *

MUNICIPALITIES

Mr. Ken Boshcoff (Thunder Bay—Rainy River, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, my question is for the Minister of State for Infrastructure and Communities.

The elimination of the GST for communities has resulted in huge savings this year alone for all municipalities. In Thunder Bay alone, for this year there have been savings of over \$1.5 million, yet many municipally elected representatives and their administrators, let alone municipal taxpayers, seem unaware of the significance of this action.

Municipal organizations from coast to coast asked for this and received it as part of the Prime Minister's initiative. Is there a way of having communities—

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of State for Infrastructure and Communities.

Hon. John Godfrey (Minister of State (Infrastructure and Communities), Lib.): Mr. Speaker, while I thank the hon. member for his question I also thank the Prime Minister for reminding the House and the leader of the New Democratic Party of the \$7 billion rebate of the GST over a 10 year period, which will go to every municipality in the country.

As for accountability, that money is like own source revenue. There were no conditions imposed. That said, I think it would well suit municipalities to invest that money in the infrastructure which is so clearly needed in this country and to give a full accounting of it.

* * *

PRESENCE IN GALLERY

The Speaker: I would like to draw the attention of hon. members to the presence in the gallery of His Excellency Tsendiin Munh-Orgil, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Mongolia.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear!

The Speaker: I would also like to draw to the attention of hon. members the presence in the gallery of Dr. William McCarter, Chairman of the International Fund for Ireland.

Some hon. members: Hear, hear!

* * *

•(1505)

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

The Speaker: It is my duty, pursuant to Standing Order 81(14), to inform the House that the motion to be considered tomorrow during consideration of the business of supply is as follows:

That, in the opinion of this House, the government's national defence policies are seriously out of date and funding has fallen dramatically short of what is needed to meet defence commitments, the combat capabilities of the Canadian Forces have been permitted to decay and the government is continuing this trend by proposing to raise a peacekeeping brigade at the expense of existing combat ready forces; and accordingly,

Routine Proceedings

This House call on the government to commit to maintaining air, land and sea combat capability by ensuring that members of the forces are trained, equipped and supported for combat operations and peacekeeping, in order to enhance Canada's status and influence as a sovereign nation.

This motion, standing in the name of the hon. member for Carleton—Mississippi Mills, is votable.

[*Translation*]

Copies of the motion are available at the Table.

* * *

[*English*]

OFFICIAL REPORT

Ms. Yasmin Ratansi (Don Valley East, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise to clarify remarks I made earlier this week and to make a correction to *Hansard*.

On October 12 during the debate on the Speech from the Throne, I referred to an investment that the Government of Canada has made in Ontario regarding affordable housing. On page 237 of *Hansard*, the figure I gave as the government's commitment was \$56 million.

It has come to my attention that this figure is out of date. I would like to point out to the House the correct figures. Under the first phase of the affordable housing initiative, the federal allocation for Ontario is approximately \$245 million. A significant portion of that allocation, totalling 2,300 units so far, has been announced, though it has not yet been spent. To date, the government has spent approximately \$10 million on the creation of over 700 units in Ontario.

I hope this will clarify the record.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

[*Translation*]

COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

PROCEDURE AND HOUSE AFFAIRS

Hon. Don Boudria (Glengarry—Prescott—Russell, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present the fourth report of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs concerning the associate membership of certain committees of the House. If the House consents, I intend to move concurrence in the fourth report later today.

[*English*]

I also have the honour to present to the House the fifth report of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs, regarding the guidelines for access to committee meetings by the electronic media. I wish to indicate to the House that if the House gives its consent, I intend to move concurrence in the fifth report later this day as well.

● (1510)

[*Translation*]

FINANCE

Mr. Massimo Pacetti (Saint-Léonard—Saint-Michel, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the first report of the Standing Committee on Finance, entitled “Duty Remission and the Zero-Rating of Tariffs on Textile Inputs: The Canadian Apparel Industry”, which was agreed upon on Tuesday, October 9, 2004. I am reporting it without amendment.

Pursuant to Standing Order 109, the committee requests that the government table a comprehensive response to this report.

[*English*]

I would request that the finance department look at it. It is something we are awaiting a response on.

Mr. Speaker, I also have the honour to present, in both official languages, the second report of the Standing Committee on Finance, “Study on Small Business Tax Measures; Review of Excise Duties and Taxes”. The committee agreed on Tuesday, October 19, 2004 to report it without amendment.

In accordance with the provisions of Standing Order 109, the committee requests that the government provide a comprehensive response to this report.

PROCEDURE AND HOUSE AFFAIRS

Hon. Don Boudria (Glengarry—Prescott—Russell, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present the sixth report of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs regarding the provisional Standing Orders governing private members' business.

If the House gives its consent, I intend to move concurrence in the sixth report, as well as the other two I just mentioned later this day.

Hon. Bryon Wilfert: On a point of order, Mr. Speaker, I request unanimous consent to present a report from an interparliamentary delegation.

The Speaker: Is there unanimous consent to revert to reports from interparliamentary delegations?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

* * *

INTERPARLIAMENTARY DELEGATIONS

Hon. Bryon Wilfert (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of the Environment, Lib.): Mr. Speaker I appreciate the indulgence of the Chair. Pursuant to Standing Order 31(1), I have the honour to present to the House, in both official languages, the report of the 13th annual bilateral meeting of the Canada-Japan Inter-Parliamentary Group held in Richmond Hill, Cambridge, Niagara-on-the-Lake and Banff from August 22 to 28, 2004.

* * *

CRIMINAL CODE

Mr. Chuck Cadman (Surrey North, Ind.) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-230, An Act to amend the Criminal Code (street racing).

Routine Proceedings

He said: Mr. Speaker, since this is my first opportunity to rise in this Parliament, I would like to congratulate you on your re-election to the chair. I would also like to thank the constituents of Surrey North for the confidence they have shown in me since 1997 by returning me here.

Street racing continues to kill or seriously injure innocent people in Canada.

I am reintroducing this legislation to amend the Criminal Code specifically to provide that street racing is to be considered an aggravating factor for the purposes of sentencing a person convicted of dangerous operation of, or criminal negligence involving a motor vehicle.

In addition, the bill provides that any person convicted under these provisions who was involved in street racing must be subject to a regime of mandatory national driving prohibitions ranging from one year to life, to be served consecutively to any other sentence imposed.

The bill received broad support in the last Parliament and I hope that will continue to be the case.

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

* * *

WORKERS MOURNING DAY ACT

Mr. Peter Stoffer (Sackville—Eastern Shore, NDP) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-231, An Act to amend the Workers Mourning Day Act (national flag to be flown at half-mast).

He said: Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague from the Bloc Québécois as well as the hon. member for Sarnia—Lambton and the hon. member for St. John's East. The bill has all-party support.

The bill honours those workers who went to work in the morning or at night but did not have a chance to go home.

April 28 is the day of mourning in this country. We are making a request on behalf of Kim Wild-Lewis, a woman who lost her husband as a result of an occupational problem and he died at work. We request that the flags on all federal buildings throughout the country be lowered to half-mast on April 28, the day of mourning in Canada.

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

* * *

• (1515)

INCOME TAX ACT

Mr. Peter Stoffer (Sackville—Eastern Shore, NDP) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-232, an act to amend the Income Tax Act (herbal remedies).

He said: Mr. Speaker, I introduced this bill in 1998 and am reintroducing it one more time. For the millions of Canadians out there who cannot take sulpha-based prescription drugs, if a licensed physician prescribes a herbal alternative, they should be able to claim that alternative as a medical tax deduction.

I seek a very quick adoption of this fine piece of legislation.

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

INCOME TAX ACT

Mr. Peter Stoffer (Sackville—Eastern Shore, NDP) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-233, an act to amend the Income Tax Act (community service group membership dues).

He said: Mr. Speaker, this is the reintroduction of a bill that has great support among volunteer groups throughout the country.

We all know that this country could not operate without the valued effort of those millions of volunteers. The bill is asking that any volunteer of a registered organization who donates 250 hours of his or her time per year be able to claim a \$1,000 one-time income tax deduction. This would benefit all the volunteers in this country tremendously.

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

* * *

OVERSEAS MEMORIAL SITES STUDENT VISITS ASSISTANCE ACT

Mr. Peter Stoffer (Sackville—Eastern Shore, NDP) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-234, an act to propose and examine a program giving financial assistance to high school students visiting overseas military memorial sites.

He said: Mr. Speaker, Remembrance Day is approaching and one of the great faults in this society is the inability of our provincial and federal governments to teach our children what happened during the wars that Canada was involved in. It is quite astonishing that people in Holland, Belgium and other countries know more about Canadian military history than our own children do.

The bill basically wants the federal government, the provinces and the school boards of the country to examine ways of getting this country's children over to the battlefields in Europe and around the world. In that way, they themselves could learn what happened on those tragic days during the war. It would enhance the remembrance of the bravest people in our country, our veterans.

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

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DIVORCE ACT

Mr. Jay Hill (Prince George—Peace River, CPC) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-245, an act to amend the Divorce Act (shared parenting).

He said: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague from Provencher for seconding the bill.

It is the first private member's bill I would like to reintroduce in Parliament this afternoon. It would ensure that courts granted shared custody of a child to both spouses undergoing a divorce, unless there existed evidence that it would not be in the best interests of the child or children.

The bill includes the recommendations of the joint House of Commons and Senate subcommittee on custody and access. The subcommittee issued its report in 1998, six years ago, yet despite the input of hundreds of parents, social workers, lawyers and child advocates, the government has shelved those recommendations. As a result, Canada's Divorce Act remains an antiquated, dysfunctional piece of legislation that does not reflect the realities of life in this century.

Also, at this time I am seeking the unanimous consent of the House that the bill be numbered C-245 as it was known in the last Parliament.

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

The Speaker: Is there unanimous consent that the bill be numbered C-245?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

* * *

• (1520)

INCOME TAX ACT

Mr. Jay Hill (Prince George—Peace River, CPC) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-246, an act to amend the Income Tax Act (child adoption expenses).

He said: Mr. Speaker, it is with great pleasure that I rise today to reintroduce my private member's bill to allow parents a one-time income tax deduction of up to \$10,000 for the expenses related to the adoption of a child.

This legislation received tremendous support from both sides of the House during the last Parliament. Thousands of parents, social workers and children's advocates across Canada eagerly await its reintroduction today.

In this Parliament, however, I have increased the maximum expense deduction to \$10,000 to better reflect the true costs of adoption, which can spiral to \$30,000 or more. I am optimistic about the passage of the bill which would modernize the federal Income Tax Act to recognize that adoptive parents make a significant contribution to all of society.

I am also seeking the unanimous consent of the House that the bill be numbered C-246 as it was known in the last Parliament.

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

The Speaker: Is there unanimous consent that the bill be numbered C-246 for the purposes of the order paper?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

* * *

CONTROLLED DRUGS AND SUBSTANCES ACT

Mr. Jay Hill (Prince George—Peace River, CPC) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-248, an act to amend the Controlled Drugs and Substances Act (trafficking in a controlled drug or substance within five hundred metres of an elementary school or a high school).

He said: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague, our justice critic, the member for Provencher for seconding this bill.

Routine Proceedings

This piece of private members' legislation concerns the need to prevent drug dealers from preying upon our children. The bill would impose minimum prison sentences of one year for a first offence and two years for further offences for a person convicted of trafficking in a narcotic within 500 metres of an elementary school or a high school.

We must send a forceful message that pushing drugs upon children will not be tolerated by our society and will result in mandatory imprisonment and not a slap on the wrist.

I am seeking the unanimous consent of the House that the bill be numbered C-248 as it was known in the last Parliament.

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

The Speaker: Is there unanimous consent that the bill be numbered C-248 for the purposes of the order paper?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

* * *

WITNESS PROTECTION PROGRAM ACT

Mr. Jay Hill (Prince George—Peace River, CPC) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-270, an act to amend the Witness Protection Program Act (protection of spouses whose life is in danger) and to make a consequential amendment to another Act.

He said: Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to reintroduce this bill that would better protect those whose lives and the lives of their children are threatened by a spouse, former spouse or intimate partner.

While there is an ad hoc program run jointly between federal government departments, the new identities program is without a legislated mandate or adequate funding.

This legislation would extend the mandate of the witness protection program to include those who have nowhere for themselves or their children to hide from an abusive spouse or partner.

I am seeking the unanimous consent of the House that the bill be numbered C-270 as it was known in the previous Parliament.

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

The Speaker: Is there unanimous consent to have this bill numbered C-270 on the order paper?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

* * *

RECOGNITION AND PROTECTION OF HUMAN RIGHTS AND FUNDAMENTAL FREEDOMS ACT

Mr. Garry Breitkreuz (Yorkton—Melville, CPC) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-235, an act to amend An Act for the Recognition and Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms and to amend the Constitution Act, 1867.

Routine Proceedings

He said: Mr. Speaker, the government's legislative record of intruding on individual property rights is appalling and this is the reason I am reintroducing my property rights bill today.

Protection of property rights needs strengthening in federal law because they were intentionally left out of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. My bill would make up for this grave omission by strengthening the property rights provisions in the Canadian Bill of Rights.

Court case after court case has proven that Canadians have no protection whatsoever to the arbitrary taking of property by the federal government.

My bill would also require a two-thirds majority vote of this House whenever the government passed laws that override fundamental property rights, such as the species at risk act, the cruelty to animals legislation, the firearms act and the Canadian Wheat Board Act.

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

* * *

• (1525)

BANKRUPTCY AND INSOLVENCY ACT

Ms. Alexa McDonough (Halifax, NDP) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-236, an act to amend the Bankruptcy and Insolvency Act (student loan).

She said: Mr. Speaker, I have the privilege of introducing this bill which is designed to undo the damage from the 1998 bogus education budget introduced by the government. The current legislation openly discriminates against students by restricting their ability to declare bankruptcy when they are driven to financial ruin by their student debt burden and inadequate post-secondary education funding.

It had been hoped that the government would remedy this injustice in the throne speech, or indicate its intention to do so. It was silent on the matter. I therefore introduce this bill to try to remedy that problem.

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

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CANADA STUDENT FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE ACT

Ms. Alexa McDonough (Halifax, NDP) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-237, an act to amend the Canada Student Financial Assistance Act (qualifying period for disability relief).

She said: Mr. Speaker, I have the privilege of introducing this afternoon a second bill entitled an act to amend the Canada Student Financial Assistance Act.

The current Canada Student Financial Assistance Act provides relief, with respect to student loan repayment, for students who have become disabled within six months after completion of their studies.

The bill recognizes that this is a woefully inadequate provision and proposes to increase the qualifying period for disability relief to five years for a student who becomes disabled after completing their studies.

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

* * *

CRIMINAL CODE

Mr. Myron Thompson (Wild Rose, CPC) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-238, an act to amend the Criminal Code (protection of children).

He said: Mr. Speaker, I thank my seatmate from Okanagan—Shuswap for seconding the bill.

As we know, the children of this country are meant to be loved, cared for and protected. Unfortunately, when we live in a country where an instrument of evil, such as child pornography, has become a billion dollar industry, there is something seriously wrong.

It is my effort, through this bill, to do everything possible to eliminate any loopholes and any defence for the possession, production and distribution of child pornography which exploits our children and has a drastic effect.

I am pleased to reintroduce the bill and I hope we can get it done. This is something that has to be accomplished in Parliament.

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

* * *

COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

PROCEDURE AND HOUSE AFFAIRS

Hon. Don Boudria (Glengarry—Prescott—Russell, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, if the House gives its consent, I move that the fourth report of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs presented to the House earlier this day be concurred in.

For greater clarity, that is the report about the associate committee memberships.

(Motion agreed to)

• (1530)

[*Translation*]

Hon. Don Boudria (Glengarry—Prescott—Russell, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, if the House consents, I move that the fifth report of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs tabled earlier this day be concurred in.

For the benefit of parliamentarians, this is the report regarding the guidelines for access to committee meetings by the electronic media.

(Motion agreed to)

[*English*]

Hon. Don Boudria (Glengarry—Prescott—Russell, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, if the House gives its consent, I move that the sixth report of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs presented to the House earlier this day be concurred in.

Routine Proceedings

Again, for the benefit of members, this report is with regard to the provisional standing orders governing private members' business.

(Motion agreed to)

* * *

NOTICE OF MOTIONS

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.):

Mr. Speaker, there have been discussion on all sides of the House and I think you would find unanimous consent for the following motion. I move:

That, notwithstanding Standing Order 54(2), during the adjournment of the House the week of November 7, 2004, the time provided for the filing with the Clerk of any notice be no later than 2 p.m. on Friday, November 12, 2004.

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

Some hon. member: Agreed.

(Motion agreed to)

* * *

[Translation]

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.):

Mr. Speaker, there have been discussions among all the parties in the House of Commons. I think that you would find unanimous consent for the following motion:

That, at 3:00 p.m., on November 1, 2004, the House shall resolve itself into a committee of the whole to recognize Canada's 2004 Athens Olympic and Paralympic Games athletes.

(Motion agreed to)

* * *

[English]

PETITIONS**CANADIAN FORCES**

Mr. Jay Hill (Prince George—Peace River, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is indeed a pleasure to rise and present yet another petition on behalf of our military families. This one is signed by citizens of Edmonton in support of our military families there.

The petitioners want to draw to the attention of the House of Commons that on-base housing provides a valuable service for our country by allowing families to live in a military community, that the Canadian Forces Housing Agency in many instances provides substandard living conditions on-base, and that the families of Canadian forces soldiers living in accommodation provided by the Canadian Forces Housing Agency have seen dramatic increases to their rental charges. Indeed, they are about to see another one in November.

Therefore, the petitioners call upon Parliament to immediately suspend any future rent increases for accommodation provided by the Canadian Forces Housing Agency until such time the Government of Canada makes substantive improvements to the living conditions of housing provided for our military families.

● (1535)

AGRICULTURE

Mrs. Carol Skelton (Saskatoon—Rosetown—Biggar, CPC):

Mr. Speaker, I rise today to present a petition on behalf of people in my riding who are very concerned about the whole BSE issue. Basically, they are inundated with financial calamity. They are losing thousands and thousands of dollars, and people across the country are affected by that.

The petitioners call upon Parliament of Canada to immediately constitute internationally credible protocol to reinforce international confidence in Canada's healthy beef products and thereby replacing damaging political posturing relating to borders with sensible, agreeable rules to all concerned.

I thank everyone, from David in Asquith to June in Perdue, for signing this petition.

* * *

[Translation]

QUESTIONS ON THE ORDER PAPER

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.):

Mr. Speaker, I ask that all questions be allowed to stand.

[English]

Mr. Greg Thompson (New Brunswick Southwest, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in relation to the questions on the order paper, I want to bring to the attention of the House and the parliamentary secretary that I have had the same exact questions on the order paper, going on two Parliaments. In fact they date back to last year in regard to the aboriginal fisheries buyout program from DFO, which DFO sponsors.

There are a number of questions on there which the government should have answered before the last election, but chose not to do that. The government worked very hard to ensure that it did not have to answer them, hoping that I would not be back in my place in the House and hoping the questions would not be back. Surprise of all surprises: I am back and so are the questions.

I believe the government is obligated to answer those questions. They are very thoughtful in their presentation, well laid out and there is nothing complicated about them. I would like to know why the government's reluctance in answering the questions. It is completely unacceptable.

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc: Mr. Speaker, I certainly was not disappointed to see the hon. member for New Brunswick Southwest back in the House. I do not know to whom he is referring. I have enjoyed a positive working relationship with my colleague from New Brunswick.

The aboriginal fisheries buyout is a very important issue. It certainly is in my constituency. I share the view that it has gone very well. I will do whatever is necessary to ensure that the hon. member for New Brunswick Southwest has his questions answered within the required time.

The Speaker: Is it agreed that all questions be allowed to stand?

The Address

Some hon. members: Agreed.

* * *

MOTIONS FOR PAPERS

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I ask that all Notices of Motions for the Production of Papers be allowed to stand.

The Speaker: Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

SPEECH FROM THE THRONE

[English]

RESUMPTION OF DEBATE ON ADDRESS IN REPLY

The House resumed from October 19 consideration of the motion for an address to Her Excellency the Governor General in reply to her speech at the opening of the session, as amended.

Mr. Michael Chong (Wellington—Halton Hills, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I will be sharing my time with the member for Cambridge.

In rising to give my address in reply to the Speech from the Throne, I am giving my maiden speech in this hallowed House. I want to thank the people of Wellington—Halton Hills for giving me the privilege of representing them here, as well as thank my wife Carrie for all she has given. I will do my best and work my hardest for my constituents.

I also join with other members in congratulating the Speaker and the Deputy Speaker on their elevation to the Chair.

I hail from the great riding of Wellington—Halton Hills. My predecessors include Alf Hales, Perrin Beatty, Otto Jelinek and Garth Turner. I am proud to serve along with my provincial counterparts, Ted Arnott and Ted Chudleigh, as well as their predecessor, Jack Johnson. I want to recognize all of them for their dedication to public service. I will strive to do the same for the people of Wellington—Halton Hills.

Wellington—Halton Hills is made up of Wellington county and Halton region. Halton region recently received recognition as one of Canada's top 100 employers. I wish to congratulate Chairman Joyce Savoline, Halton Region Council and all of Halton Region's 1,700 staff for this recognition. This award recognizes that Halton has attracted and retained skilled employees to the public sector, employees who are a big part of the reason that Halton is such a great place to live.

As we embark on this 38th Parliament since Confederation, I hope that all my colleagues will join me in congratulating Halton region on this award.

Like many new Canadians who come today and those who came before, my late mother and father came to this country with nothing but dreams and hopes. Through perseverance and hard work they blazed a path so that their children could pursue opportunities unbounded in this vast and inchoate land. We owe much to these

pioneers who came before and began to build this country. Their project is not yet finished and we must carry on.

I believe in one Canadian people and in one Canada. To be sure, there are a myriad of ethnic groups, there are the different regions, there are the two founding cultures and languages, and before all of these there were and are the native peoples. Each in their own unique and important way has contributed to the fabric and diversity of this country. However, above all of these, there is one Canadian identity, fragile as it sometimes may be. An identity forged out of war, out of history and out of tribulation, but above all, an identity forged out of an encounter with a vast and inchoate land.

It was this vision of a common Canadian identity that moved Sir John A. Macdonald to forge the mergers necessary for Confederation. He united the French Catholics of Canada east with the English Protestants of Canada west to form what would become the Conservative Party of Canada. He joined with his most hated nemesis, George Brown, to make this happen. It was in this spirit of nation building that our leader, the hon. member for Calgary Southwest, and our deputy leader, the hon. member for Central Nova, forged a coalition for the betterment of Canada.

As it was once said by a great member of this House, political capital is not meant to be hoarded but spent on great causes for one's country. It is in this spirit of bettering my country that I criticize the throne speech on two issues: agriculture and funding for municipalities.

Agriculture is important to Wellington—Halton Hills. It was to my riding, into Puslinch township, that the first Hereford cattle were imported into Canada by Frederick Stone in the 1850s. It is in my riding that part of the world renowned Ontario Agricultural College of the University of Guelph is located. Wellington county and Halton region together have 3,200 farms generating \$570 million in farm gate sales.

However the Speech from the Throne does little to address the problems facing these farmers, especially for those farmers devastated by BSE in non-managed markets. It is ironic that 46 years after Alf Hales rose in this very House to speak up on behalf of beleaguered farmers, I now do the same with one big difference: the plight of today's farmer is far, far worse than it was in 1958.

● (1540)

Speaking in January 1958 on a farm bill introduced by the Diefenbaker government, Alf Hales stated in *Hansard* that the average selling price of steers for the 10 year period was \$21.80 a hundredweight. That was in 1958 dollars. Today that would be \$150 per hundredweight.

The base support price set by the government for farmers in 1958 was \$17.44 per hundredweight. Even then farmers struggled. Today that would be a base support price of \$120 per hundredweight.

The government's agricultural policy does not even come close to that kind of support.

The Address

Because of the government's farm policy in non-managed markets, the average family farm is no longer economically viable. The average farmer can no longer make ends meet and must rent hundreds if not thousands of acres to achieve the economies of scale necessary for a very modest profit.

We are creating a new kind of feudalism in this country where landowners rent their farmland out to impoverished tenant farmers. This is a shame in a country like Canada. We should and we can do better.

The throne speech also fails to deliver on money for municipalities. While I realize that a throne speech is the broad strokes of a government's plan, this one is so vague as to be meaningless.

It is possible the government will announce funding details by the end of the year but municipalities need details now so they can start budgeting for 2005. The municipalities face huge infrastructure costs. I will give two examples to illustrate my point.

The township of Centre Wellington, with a population of 22,000, has over 100 bridges. In that township alone we are currently facing bridge repair costs of \$15 million, is a huge number for a township with an annual operating budget of only \$15 million.

In Halton Hills I have been told there is a backlog of \$57 million in road work and other infrastructure, an equally big number for a community with only 50,000 people and an annual operating budget of \$20 million.

While these numbers may seem small to some, if one were to extrapolate them to a city the size of Toronto with a population of 2.5 million, one would get an infrastructure backlog of \$1.7 billion to \$2.9 billion. All of which is to say that rural communities, with their more scattered populations and large infrastructure, face the same kinds of challenges on a per capita basis that larger, more densely populated communities do.

We should not forget these rural communities, the lifeblood of our nation across its vast geographic expanse. However I worry that smaller communities will get less of the money on a per capita basis in favour of more densely populated areas.

I am also concerned that the government has moved from a specific to a vague commitment. During the election, 5¢ per litre of the gas tax was promised. In the most recent throne speech we now hear a promise of a portion of the gas tax. I hope the government is not backing away from its commitment to cities and municipalities.

Municipalities desperately need the money. The lack of detail and the lack of action means more closed bridges, more deteriorating roads and ultimately higher property taxes because the money must come from somewhere.

It means that seniors, like Maria Kurath in Erin, may have to sell their homes because they cannot afford the property taxes. These are the real life stories of what happens when a government fails to act.

The gas tax promise was made before the election, during the election and after the election. It has been mentioned in two throne speeches. There is a \$9.1 billion surplus. The time for vague talk is over. It is time for action.

In closing I wish to indicate my support for the loyal opposition's amendment to the Speech from the Throne.

● (1545)

Mr. Gary Goodyear (Cambridge, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise in the House on this occasion to present to the House my response to the throne speech on behalf of my riding and the good people of Cambridge and North Dumfries.

I would like to say how honoured I am to represent the community where I was born and, for the most part, have lived my entire life. I intend to dedicate my energy and all my skills to represent my community, my neighbours and my good friends all across what has clearly been a forgotten centre of wealth, both industrially and intellectually.

My riding sits just 45 minutes southwest of Toronto and holds in its northern corner the city of Cambridge with some 113,000 people. We enjoy a pluralism of many communities from all around the world. Our industry is considered some of the best. Companies, such as ATS and Rockwell Automation, Toyoto, Challenger Motor Freight, ComDev, Strite Industries, Babcock, John Forsyth Shirts, Arriscraft and Polymer Technologies, are now famous contributors, not only to the Canadian landscape but to the global landscape.

Cambridge is one of the fastest growing communities in Canada. Indeed, only a few years ago the Hespeler part of Cambridge was considered to have the fastest growth rate in Canada.

North Dumfries is the beautiful rolling hills of quiet pasture lands and quaint communities such as Branchton and Ayr just south of the city itself.

This area is mostly agriculture and attracts visitors who dine in wonderful little eateries and visit antique shops. Some are so drawn to the spirit of this area that they relocate their families here and it too now grows, straining infrastructure and health care services.

These communities are bulging and at the same time are strangled by the government's lack of forethought. Traffic comes to a virtual halt as cars and trucks attempt to navigate too few lanes and too few bridges. Childhood asthma is now increasing at alarming rates as our skies become polluted, not just from the idling vehicles stuck in traffic but as a result of emissions from our border states.

What has the government done for our riding? With respect to these concerns, we still wait and fear that we will be left out of a new deal for cities and communities. We believe that unless distribution is based on population, or at least on fuel consumption, that only the larger Liberal centres will benefit.

The Address

Cambridge and North Dumfries need stable and predictable funding too. After the Liberal finance minister bled the health care system to near death, literally causing the crisis we now face, the Liberal Premier of Ontario implemented a health tax and cut services, such as chiropractic and physiotherapy, care that has a proven track record of decreasing the cost of health.

Now we suffer double dipping deep into the pockets of Ontarians for their health care.

Despite the throne speech and the recent 10 year plan to strengthen health care, we do not have any fix for a generation. The government has already had 10 years to put in place a concrete plan to restore the number of doctors and front line workers.

Our community lacks doctors in a most serious way. I can tell the House that people's lives are in danger.

The government has been and continues to waste the skills and minds of thousands of new Canadians while other Canadians suffer. More MRIs, without a concurrent plan for more front line workers, does not help the problem. All it has done is moved the line from diagnostics to treatment.

The people of my riding not only deserve better, they demanded it. It is my privilege to finally represent them in achieving a more level playing field from their government.

No longer will it be acceptable for a community our size and with our needs to be hushed and ignored. Our region sends almost \$1 billion more to the government than it receives. Still all levels of taxation are strangling and destroying our right to live well now and into our twilight years.

● (1550)

Cambridge is held together by an amazing group of volunteers. The good news is that there are thousands of people in my riding who dedicate themselves every day to projects like Cara's Hope, Bridges, Argus House, the food bank of Cambridge and so many others. The sad news is that the government, with its billions of dollars in hidden surpluses, has allowed it to happen in the first place.

These groups and social programs should not be punished because of past corrupt and incompetent behaviour by this very government. Tightening the application process, redefining accessibility rules, and designing complex forms that require lawyers to fill out to make up for its billion dollar boondoggles is just plain unfair.

Canadians are indirectly being punished because the government has and continues to waste good money on silly programs like the gun registry. The gun registry is the ultimate boondoggle and again, almost as predictable as the stars, this too was not even mentioned in the throne speech. The fact that it takes the government \$2,000 to simply write down that a duck hunter owns a \$300 rifle lends credence to the old adage that if the Liberals owned McDonald's, a Big Mac would cost \$25 and take six weeks to get.

The Prime Minister has put forth a speech that is not only vague and inadequate, but has failed to give us any confidence that the government's past mistakes will not be repeated.

What of the BSE crisis? My hon. colleague mentioned it and this is the largest crisis to face Canada in my memory. The records show that it is the Conservative Party that has fought the hardest, not only for the farmers but for the millions of people affected by the collateral damage from this crisis.

From hardware stores to trucking companies, from universities to furniture stores, this crisis has bled an estimated \$6 billion out of our economy and destroyed generations of work for thousands of Canadians.

What are we to think when the programs that the Liberals do put into place have no application forms and require farmers to put tens of thousands of dollars that they do not have into the banks to be eligible? What little money Liberals do throw at these programs is only enough to tide things over for a few months, mainly to reassure the banks. People are without hope. Liberals smirk and blame everyone else for their failed initiatives.

It is just like hep C. The ones who are being helped the most on these programs are the administrators. In some cases hundreds of thousands of dollars a month are being spent on administration fees. We cannot find money to increase our old age securities in any real way, but the Liberals have found \$133,000 for the funding of films in Toronto to find the best penis.

The throne speech says it will continue to review the EI program. What does that mean? That to me is just more fluff and more rhetoric. The Liberals have been at this for 10 years. Canadians and their employers have been bilked out of \$45 billion and they do not want more review. They want their money back or at least some assurance that the money will be used only for the benefit of the workers.

We can only be left with one conclusion. This throne speech, like the almost identical last few, is written with words meaning to impress Canadians about the Liberals rather than putting in place concrete solutions for Canadians. The sheer impotence of the throne speech confirms that the Prime Minister and his party choose to play it safe at the expense of hardworking Canadians who deserve far better.

In closing, we in Cambridge still worry about our health. We are very concerned about infrastructure and we need help. We need bridges, light rail transit, go trains, roads and highways. Our future growth is being compromised. We are overworked as volunteers and desperately need the government to do the right thing and spend our taxes on programs that work for us, not just its friends.

● (1555)

We do not need more talk; we need action. We do not need pretty speeches; we need firm, creative solutions. We do not need politicians; we need leaders.

The Address

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the member's speech brings up a number of points of concern that I would have.

I was interested to hear his concern that farmers who should be getting the BSE money are not getting the BSE money. This is an issue that is coming to us in our area in terms of CAISP funding.

I would like to find out if he has any suggestions regarding the issue of hepatitis C where money that should have gone to people who needed it went to the wrong people. We hear much about the kind of profits that packers have made. We have many concerns about regional capacity and the ability of regional smaller plants to stand up to the packers.

We also have a real concern with the kind of money that will be flowing out now. Our farmers are more under the thumb of the big packers now than they have ever been.

I would ask the hon. member, does he have any suggestions or any insights into this that might enlighten us?

• (1600)

Mr. Gary Goodyear: Mr. Speaker, this is a two part question and I will respond to the first part right away.

On the issue of BSE, clearly the government has put programs in place; however, I cannot answer how it could not put forward uncomplicated forms at the same time that farmers could access. The member is probably best to ask the government itself why it did that. My feeling is that there is some need to frustrate people and make these promises that perhaps the government has no intention of keeping.

The money is there; it is not enough. Clearly the solution is to open the borders. The government has been completely ineffective in resolving this particular crisis in terms of a long term solution.

As far as packing plants go, as I am sure the hon. member knows, the government has put forth a promise which amounts to approximately \$38 million, when indeed it knows that Canada needs at least two processing plants at a cost of around \$150 million. This seems to me a government that is not willing to step up to the plate and do what is necessary. It sounds to me that if the government were asked for \$200 million, it would give \$100 million. If we were to need \$70 million, it would give \$30 million.

As far as the hepatitis C issue is concerned, this government has overestimated the number of cases of hepatitis C. It seems to me that there was some suggestion by a past minister that there could be as many as 25,000 to 30,000 people that would claim on that fund. The fact of the matter is that there have been approximately 8,800 claims. These are claims and not actual payouts. Indeed, the actual number is under 5,000.

If this government would show some compassion and open this thing up to everyone who could submit a claim, that is before 1986 and after 1991, indeed it seems that there would be an additional 4,000 claims. There is more than enough money in the fund to respond to the needs of these victims. The government—

The Deputy Speaker: Order, please. We have time for just one more question from the member for York South—Weston and a quick answer as well.

Mr. Alan Tonks (York South—Weston, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I wonder if the member could outline what he thinks and feels would be an equitable formula with respect to the gas tax being used as a basis for meeting the kind of needs that he very eloquently outlined that exist in a very dynamic municipality where we have agricultural and rural interests. However, we also have a need to build such things as light rail transit connecting up the various parts of the corridor that Cambridge and Kitchener-Waterloo in fact are extremely dependent on in terms of moving people? Would the member provide some insights based on his experience on that?

Mr. Gary Goodyear: Mr. Speaker, our concern in Cambridge is that if we are going to have a distribution formula that meets the needs of those who are using transit, it is going to leave out a lot of communities. Again, as I said, it will simply favour those communities that already have transit in place.

Our community would benefit, as would many other communities, from a distribution formula that was based on perhaps fuel consumption within that area. Failing that, a formula that would be based on population would allow these communities that are growing to have these programs put in place.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Benoît Sauvageau (Repentigny, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I will be sharing my time with the hon. member for Louis-Saint-Laurent. It is an honour and a privilege for me to do so. I do not mean the former Prime Minister, who was in power from 1948 to 1957, but the riding of Louis-Saint-Laurent. My colleague who represents that riding will also speak in this 20-minute period in response to the Speech from the Throne.

The Bloc Québécois is pleased to support the Speech from the Throne as amended. Since this is my fourth time being elected, it is the fourth time that I have the privilege and opportunity to speak to the Speech from the Throne. As I said to reporters in my riding, this speech is quite exceptional. I think you have experienced the same thing, Mr. Speaker, during your political career. Coming to this minority government and being able to truly negotiate and amend the throne speech in a concrete, conclusive and significant manner is a solid way of increasing and enhancing the role of MPs and all political parties.

All the parties, the New Democrats, the Conservatives and ours, have sat in opposition, in the traditional sense. Journalists and analysts used to wonder what the point was in having opposition MPs, since they could not really effect change. I believe the past two weeks have shown the entire population that, regardless of the political party they voted for, the MPs who represent them in the House of Commons each have an extremely important role to play, especially in a minority government.

The Address

The Bloc Québécois' amendment to the amendment significantly changed the throne speech, as regards both recognition and respect of provincial jurisdictions, more specifically those of Quebec, and the recognition of the fiscal imbalance. Had the Bloc Québécois not been here in Ottawa, the Liberals would certainly not have woken up one day saying they wanted to add all this to the throne speech. These major changes also relate to the agreement reached by all political parties to change the employment insurance program, to the tax cuts for middle income families, to the implementation of a system to calculate surpluses or prepare financial statements more conclusively and to a vote on the missile defence shield plan. These are four issues in which I will be taking a particular interest. The Liberals would not have spontaneously written a throne speech that would have included these important issues for Quebecers and Canadians.

The Liberals delivered a speech that was reminiscent of the days when they formed a majority government, a speech full of pious pronouncements and vague rhetoric. They used to tell us that, because they were a majority government, the Speech from the Throne would be passed and that we would just have to put up with it. The fact that they now find themselves in a minority situation has forced the Liberals to look more closely at what they were writing and to make corrections, first to honour the promises they made during the election campaign—time will tell whether they will act on their commitments—and also present to the public a throne speech that has more substance.

The amendment presented by the Conservative Party and supported by the Bloc Québécois and all members—indeed, it was unanimously passed—includes the following:

1. An order of reference to the Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills Development, Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities instructing the committee to recommend measures that would ensure that all future uses of the employment insurance program would only be for the benefit of workers and not for any other purpose.

The first point of the amendment put forward by the Conservative Party is very important. A total of \$40 billion was taken out of the EI fund to pay off the debt and get rid of the deficit. The Liberal Party also has a debt, but that is another story. The Liberals used the sponsorship program to try to pay off part of their debt.

If it is recognized in the throne speech that all future uses of the employment insurance program would be for the benefit of workers only and not for any other purpose, then it would be perceived by all as a major victory.

●(1605)

Unfortunately, this huge victory came only after all the promises the Liberals made in 1997 when they travelled to the regions and said “We will change the unfair employment insurance system”. In 2000, they came back with the same promise and said “We will change and improve the EI system.” The only references to this issue in the throne speech before the amendment reiterated the things we had heard in 1997 and 2000, in other words, the government would have continued to plunder the EI fund to replenish the consolidated revenue account and bail out the country.

So, this is an important point for the unemployed, the workers and employers, all of whom contribute to the EI fund.

The second point of the amendment urges the government to consider the advisability of:

Opportunities to further reduce the tax burden on low and modest income families consistent with the government's overall commitment to balanced budgets and sound fiscal management.

There is absolutely no doubt that we, along with all the other parties in opposition, do not want to see the government end up with another deficit, which our families, our children and grandchildren will have to pay off some day. However, when a government amasses a surplus in excess of \$9.1 billion, it might give some thought to disadvantaged families, and perhaps give Quebec the \$700 million it is short in connection with parental leave.

Speaking of parental leave, I am going to read a letter from a mother. I will give her name and read parts of her letter, and I will tell you how an amendment like this one could have improved the situation of the men and women in each of our ridings. Magalie Lebrun of L'Épiphanie writes:

I am 26 years old and I just had a baby girl on August 26, 2004. My partner and I are both middle income earners. I trained in early childhood education at a CEGEP and am working toward a certificate in early childhood educational reinforcement through the Université du Québec à Montréal. Since the baby was born, I have been on maternity benefits...I took precautionary withdrawal from work.

...How come my earnings have been halved? ...

I am sure we are not the only ones in the same boat. We are too well off to get any help, but too poor to manage. It certainly is frustrating when you compare our situation with the way things are done in certain parts of Europe, where families are really encouraged and helped. It is society's choice, and I am glad of that, but how can anyone have children when we know that we will be up to our ears in financial problems afterward? Writing this will not have any effect on my own situation, I am sure, but at least it has given me a chance to tell you how unfair I feel this all is.

That is a letter from a woman in my riding. How many women and how many modest families could write us letters like that? How many families, living in modest or barely decent conditions, are saying to themselves, “Writing to my member of Parliament will not have any impact”?

Our role here in the House of Commons is to follow up on this letter and help these families living in difficult conditions, because what we want in our society is to have a family policy and to help young families. But we have to stop talking and get into action.

Consequently, the second amendment proposed by the Conservative Party of Canada and supported by the Bloc Québécois, to reduce the tax burden on low and modest income families is necessary in order to respond to situations like this one seen daily in all our ridings.

In order to reduce the tax burden on these families, we must have budget forecasts that hold up. When the government tells us that the predicted surplus for 2003-04 will be \$1.2 billion, and at the end we find there was a surplus of \$9 billion, is that not a difference that could have been used to help families like this?

That is why the third amendment calls for an independent committee to provide more precise estimates of surpluses, and we will decide together how to allocate them in accordance with the second amendment and other factors.

The Address

I would like to point out one victory, perhaps not the most important, but a very important one, in these amendments to the throne speech. It is the fact that the House of Commons will be able to vote for or against Canada's participation in the missile defence shield and participation and coordination with the American government.

It is well known that the Bloc Québécois is opposed to taking part in the missile defence system. We are asking, and have been asking for a long time, for the opportunity to hold a vote here in the House. The government has always refused.

• (1610)

Now, we have succeeded in amending the Speech from the Throne to ensure that there will be a vote in the House on whether or not Canada participates in the missile defence shield.

For all these reasons, I believe these amendments to the throne speech make winners of the opposition parties and the people of Quebec.

• (1615)

Mr. Marcel Gagnon (Saint-Maurice—Champlain, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I would like to congratulate my colleague, the member for Repentigny, on his excellent analysis of the throne speech and on the amendments we put forward, making the throne speech presentable.

This is the fourth time the member for Repentigny has been elected, with a bigger majority each time. He has been re-elected because he knows what he is doing and works very hard for his constituents.

He talked about employment insurance. We will try to bring about changes that will improve the EI scheme forever. It will be fairer for workers and for those who contribute to it.

I have a question for the member. As we know the EI surplus is somewhere between \$40 billion and \$45 billion. It is about that. The Liberal government took the surplus to pay down the debt. They say the amount put towards the debt is approximately the same as the EI surplus plus \$3 billion that was supposed to go to seniors.

Something puzzles me and I would like to hear what the member has to say about it. Workers earning \$39,000 and less are contributing to the EI fund. When you take that money to pay down the national debt it means that those who earn the least are paying down a good part of the debt. Accordingly, if I earn \$25,000, I contribute fully to the EI fund, and the EI surplus goes to repay the debt of the country.

I would like to have his take on that. In my mind, it is not that worker who put the country into debt. I would like to have his opinion on that.

Mr. Benoît Sauvageau: Mr. Speaker, the member for Saint-Maurice—Champlain is absolutely right. It is quite the paradox. A \$9 billion surplus was accumulated and set aside. A \$45 billion surplus was taken from the employment insurance fund to pay down the debt. As the hon. member was saying, this surplus came from premiums paid by those who earn up to \$39,000. In other words, those who earn more than \$39,000 pay EI premiums up to \$39,000 and that is all.

People who have the means should have to pay more to the employment insurance plan if it is to be a fair plan. People who earn \$18,000, \$25,000 or \$30,000 certainly should not have to pay down the country's debt. This debt should have been paid down through budget cuts, not by increasing departmental spending by 30% or 40% over the past 10 years.

As the member for Saint-Maurice—Champlain was saying, it is the small contributors who had to pay down the debt by contributing to the EI fund. There is worse to come. My colleague from Saint-Maurice—Champlain has been working on this very important case for many years and he knows that in addition to having stolen \$45 billion from the public, the government has stolen millions, even billions, from the Guaranteed Income Supplement by denying senior citizens money to which they were entitled.

To make his budgets look good, for the Prime Minister—the former finance minister—to be able to go around saying that the books are balanced, this government penalized senior citizens by denying them the Guaranteed Income Supplement. It paid down the debt with surplus EI premiums. Today, it comes here rather boastful and expects gratitude, but it is the most disadvantaged in our society who have paid and left us in a better financial situation.

We think this is unbelievable and unacceptable. We will keep saying so to make sure that in the future this money will go to those who are entitled to it and who have contributed fair and square. We are talking about the disadvantaged, poor families, people like Magalie Lebrun who decided to have children and start a family, and people who came before us and are now retired.

Mr. Marc Boulianne (Mégantic—L'Érable, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I too wish to congratulate the hon. member for Repentigny on his scholarly presentation, which was very instructive. I am particularly interested in the amendments and amendments to amendments.

Basically, he told us that, now, the Speech from the Throne contains not only the government's intentions but also those of the opposition, including the Bloc's amendment to an amendment.

Does the government, accordingly, now feel compelled to act on this amendment and will it be bound by it?

• (1620)

Mr. Benoît Sauvageau: Mr. Speaker, a famous author once wrote the answer to that, “—that is the question”.

In theory, the government is bound by the Speech from the Throne, which defines what the government's legislative obligations will be. It is the program for this session of Parliament. But on many occasions, the government has been known to promise one thing and then do the opposite, or else nothing at all.

That is how the Liberals got elected three times on the promise of correcting the EI program. The very worst of the broken promises was the one they made in their 1993 red book saying that, if elected, a Liberal government would restore public confidence in the political community. To restore this confidence, they implemented the sponsorship program that resulted in a \$100 million scandal. That is probably their biggest broken promise.

The Address

Mr. Bernard Cleary (Louis-Saint-Laurent, BQ): Mr. Speaker, first, since this is my maiden speech in this House, I would like to thank the constituents of the new riding of Louis-Saint-Laurent, located in the greater Quebec City area, for sending me here. I want them to know that I am honoured.

In this important speech, I will highlight the main elements of my own agenda as the aboriginal affairs and northern development critic for the Bloc Québécois and as an aboriginal person from Quebec, an Innu-Montagnais from Mashteuiatsh.

Let me start by saying how disappointed I am by this insignificant throne speech, which has only five paragraphs about the first nations. Those paragraphs reiterate the usual generalizations and empty and often inconsequential lip service that usually appears, with a few changes, in most throne speeches. It is an empty shell.

The government's bland commitment identifies the usual horrors, such as the rate of teen suicide, which I was distressed to note recently when I visited the Manouane reserve and learned about a suicide pact some young Attikameks had made. The fetal alcohol syndrome, the yawning chasm between Aboriginal people from other Canadians in the basic living conditions, including the incidence of chronic diseases and housing and clean water. In the Speech from the Throne, the government does not however offer any specific solutions, afraid that such responsible promises could force them to bring about results.

I mention all of this because the elected Prime Minister promised us some great projects before the last election. The throne speech shows once again that the promises made by politicians, even by the Prime Minister, are not acted upon if they fail to meet with the approval of certain influential public servants.

The present government wonders what it could do that would have more impact, that could make a real change in the incidence of fetal alcohol syndrome and suicide among young people. My answer is that it stop talking about its goals and get down to focussing every effort to make significant changes in these two areas. The future of our native young people depends on it. Let the Prime Minister go and see just how crucial these problems are on the reserves. He will understand that the time for talking about goals is past; now the problems must be solved.

I have reread some of the key points in the report by the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples in order to be able to make some useful suggestions to the present government that it would find acceptable.

These proposals from one royal commission after another are just gathering dust on a shelf somewhere. To gain some time after the events in Oka in 1990, the federal government paid for a complete investigation costing some \$52 million, the royal commission reports. Since then, the Liberal government has made a few trifling reforms of no great consequence, designed particularly not to stir up any irresponsible criticisms from voters.

It is a real scandal that all these reports are out there, gathering dust on shelves, useless but very expensive reports referred to only by academics. Unfortunately the federal government, which footed the bill for them all, does not make use of the wealth of knowledge they contain, on the pretext that the cost might be too high. The

politicians behind the decision to create that royal commission ought to realize that Canada's Aboriginal peoples are Canada's third world, and that some major changes are needed to remedy the huge wrongs that have been caused.

● (1625)

I hope that they have evaluated what the outcome of such an operation would be, and the costs of implementing the changes. If they have not, it reflects very badly on the Conservative decision makers in office at the time. I sincerely do not believe, that the first peoples of Canada deserve such treatment, after the hundreds of years of abuse, pointed out so expertly by the royal commission, and acknowledged by the Liberal government of the last Prime Minister.

A careful and objective examination of the history of Canada led the commissioners to the conclusion that this supposed new world is built on the non-respect of treaties between the first nations and the first newcomers.

These treaties of alliance and friendship on the sharing of the land were quickly replaced by government policies of the colonial powers, which were highly questionable. These were intended, and I quote the commission report on this:

- to remove Aboriginal people from their homelands;
- suppress Aboriginal nations and their governments;
- undermine Aboriginal cultures.

The Liberal Government of Canada did recognize this in its historic Statement of Reconciliation of 1997, but the *mea culpa* ended there. It was just a passing phase.

The Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development at that time, Jane Stewart, reacted with complete indifference to the conclusions of the royal commission reported the previous year. She said that Canada was not very proud of it. She thus reinforced part of the most stinging conclusions of the royal commission, which should have incited the government to act as quickly as possible.

The Liberal minister paid dearly for this momentary lapse, since a few months later she was relieved of her duties as Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development, the trustee for Canada's aboriginal peoples.

The commissioners were intent on presenting the outlines for a complete action plan for the Government of Canada, the trustee for the Indians.

The social project the report proposed was intended to change lives. I shall quote another passage from the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples:

- to ensure that Aboriginal children grow up knowing that they matter—that they are precious human beings deserving love and respect, and that they hold the keys to a future bright with possibilities in a society of equals.

The point of departure for the commissioners was the obvious recognition of the fact that the aboriginal peoples are not, as some seem to think, an unimportant minority group whose problems need solving. We must understand that the royal commission's mandate was not to modernize outdated attitudes about Amerindians.

The Address

In conclusion, I want to point out that the royal commission proposed a program of change that would stretch over 20 years and contain all these elements and more. During that period, the commissioners said, a great many aboriginal nations could be helped to achieve autonomy.

Canada and Quebec will draw from the strength of the aboriginal people, in a full partnership.

Where are we now, in reality, more than 8 years later, in 2004, early in this new millennium, with respect to reconciliation? Not very far along, I must honestly admit.

The new Liberal government has missed a fine opportunity to add headlines to Canada's contemporary history books.

• (1630)

Mr. Yvon Lévesque (Abitibi—Baie-James—Nunavik—Eeyou, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased with the comments made by my two colleagues. They presented the problems that exist in my own riding, a riding which I am very proud to represent.

Let us take the example of aboriginals in the North, particularly James Bay, and in Nunavik. They want to develop their economy but, like any other nation, they need help. These people are forced to leave their homes to continue their education, so that they can then manage their own affairs and be proud of themselves. Moreover, they are denied access to the employment insurance program.

I have a question for the hon. member regarding this issue: If these people could continue their education without having to leave their families, would this help reduce the levels of alcoholism and suicide?

Mr. Bernard Cleary: Mr. Speaker, it goes without saying that unemployment in aboriginal communities creates all sorts of social problems. It is also obvious that if there were jobs and if aboriginal people could work in their communities, their social conditions would greatly improve.

One thing that may help improve the situation is negotiations. The reason aboriginal people sit down at the table to try to regain part of their ancestral lands is to take advantage of the natural resources to develop and work in their community, which they are much more familiar with.

[*English*]

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to ask a few questions of the hon. member, being that I represent the great people of the Cree, who live on the other side of James Bay. It is an unfortunate situation that the Cree are not representing themselves here in the House and have to rely on us to speak on their behalf.

We see the terrible poverty that the Cree are living in on the James Bay and Hudson Bay coasts. We see the lack of opportunities given them and the continual failure of the federal government to respond to them.

I would like to ask the hon. member what he thinks of what is happening in Ontario, where the provincial legislature is moving forward with a resource revenue-sharing agreement for all northern

first nations people, so that for their traditional lands, any hydro, mineral or lumber development on those lands must include resource revenue-sharing with the first nation people on whose lands that development is taking place.

• (1635)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Bernard Cleary: Mr. Speaker, obviously, if this agreement is implemented, the Cree will reap huge economic spinoffs. These days, we hear a lot about the peace of the Braves agreement. In Quebec, this agreement promotes the development of the Cree. They have fully benefited from the spinoffs of this accord, and they should continue to do so for a long time to come.

The fact is that Quebec—and this is perhaps the best thing that has resulted from the negotiations in recent years—has recognized that the Cree should be involved in the development of their ancestral lands. Personally, I feel this is the only way to succeed in making aboriginal people productive and proud to earn a living. Instead of relying on government assistance, as they have in the past, Cree people should be able to work in businesses that they have created. They should be able to develop and make a contribution to Canada, instead of having to rely on government assistance.

The most interesting point in the report of the royal commission is the statement to the effect that we must cure aboriginals from the ailments that have been plaguing them and give them the pride that they need to develop their potential.

[*English*]

The Deputy Speaker: It is my duty pursuant to Standing Order 38 to inform the House that the question to be raised tonight at the time of adjournment is as follows: the hon. member for St. John's South—Mount Pearl, Fisheries.

Hon. David Emerson (Minister of Industry, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I will be sharing my time with my colleague, the Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development.

It is a great honour for me to be here representing the people of Vancouver Kingsway. The privilege has been made greater by the Prime Minister appointing me Minister of Industry.

I am delighted to be speaking in support of the Speech from the Throne. I am delighted to be part of the team that has delivered Canadian economic performance that leads the G-7. I am delighted to be part of a government that has delivered seven consecutive balanced budgets, a substantial program of tax cuts, and a reduced debt burden that will continue to fall over the next decade.

Without this outstanding fiscal and economic performance, a progressive social agenda would be purely academic. There would be no renewal of our health care system, there would be no watershed program to transform cities and communities, and there would be no national program for the care and development of children.

The Address

I have a deeply held belief that the pre-eminent role of government is to look to the future. Our most important job is to hand to the members of the next generation a country they can be proud of: a country of opportunity, a country of powerful humanitarian values, a country that leaves no one behind, and a country that draws people and regions together. In other words, a country that is far more than the sum of its parts.

To do this, we need to take our economy to another level. That means taking our competitiveness to another level. It means we have to shockproof our economy. We do face economic threats and challenges. We do face protectionist actions. We do see constant attempts to attract our best companies. We face critical choices. Companies and operations that anchor large clusters of industry are being offered incentives to go elsewhere.

The pulling up of those anchors would have serious consequences for whole regions and whole sectors. We have to fight back. We have to ensure that this country is, by a significant margin, the place to invest for the long haul.

We have some work to do. Our productivity continues to lag behind the United States'. Research and development by private companies is not sufficient to deliver competitive superiority. Infrastructure investments are required to resolve border bottlenecks, not just at the Canada-U.S. border but congestion at our ports and along the corridors leading to ports and border crossings. We are by far the most trade dependent of the G-7 countries. We have the most to gain and the most to lose from the ups and downs of the global marketplace.

We are as a government driving Canadian trade interests at the WTO through NAFTA and through a variety of other mechanisms. We are giving priority to third market development and we are pressing ahead with border security and facilitation issues.

But let us not kid ourselves. There is much that we do not and cannot control. For Canada to be strong, sovereign and independent, there is only one reliable form of insurance. That is the insurance that comes from being the best.

We have to bring our competitive performance to first place. If we are the most trade dependent country, we have to be the most competitive country. That means a quantum improvement in our competitive position. That will not be quick and it will not be easy. It means a margin of competitive advantage has to be attained that will enable us to withstand protectionist actions like softwood lumber, like beef under the guise of BSE, and now pork.

We are not going to be the best by paying our people the least. We are going to be the best by being a technological leader. We are going to be the best by empowering our workforce with the skills and tools it needs to outshine the competition. We have to be at the leading edge of critical scientific developments. We need a cadre of scientific and technical entrepreneurs who can look at science and see commercial opportunity.

● (1640)

We are going to have to regulate smarter and better than anyone. In many cases, our regulatory regimes are complex, duplicative and unresponsive to innovative approaches. We should not lower our standards, but we do need to re-engineer how we regulate.

Regulatory costs are largely invisible and they are seldom measured, but I can tell hon. members they are very large.

We are going to have to support critical sectors. I hear many people talking about sunset industries. They used to point at the forest industry as a sunset industry and now I see people pointing at the automotive industry as a sunset industry. I have to say that there really are very few, if any, sunset industries. There are industries that have become globally competitive and there are industries that need to transform to become globally competitive.

We are going to have to maintain and enhance our leadership in "enabling technologies", such as information and communications technologies, life sciences, nanotechnology and advanced materials. We are going to have to do better than anyone in commercializing and applying science. Canadian businesses, particularly in the small and medium-sized enterprise sector, are not aggressive enough at applying technology to improve the competitiveness of their businesses. We need to fix that.

An economy that is environmentally and economically sustainable is not just desirable, it is essential. Without it we will not be able to carry the freight of social programs that are so vital to Canadians. The Speech from the Throne recognizes these challenges. It signals the priorities that will ensure our next generation receives the torch with a lead, a lead that it too can build on.

I look forward to working with all of the members of the House as we take Canada to a whole new level of competitiveness.

Hon. Rob Nicholson (Niagara Falls, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to congratulate the minister on his appointment.

I was very interested in a number of comments he made, particularly with respect to some of the issues at the border. It was not mentioned in the Speech from the Throne, although there were comments that the government is committed to increasing and improving economic prosperity in this country. I think the minister would agree with me that if there is congestion at the border or if the borders are not working in terms of moving the Canadian economy, there will not be economic prosperity in this country.

The minister said the government has a number of plans in a number of different areas. I certainly welcome that. He did comment that there are many things "we do not and cannot control", but certainly I would hope that in those areas the government can take the initiative with the United States, also improving the facilities on the Canadian side of the border. This would certainly be welcome and would go a long way to improve the situation.

I wonder if the minister could let the House know when, in his opinion, some of these changes are going to result in the improvements to and the expediting of traffic, which we must have and which I think the minister will agree with me has to take place if this country is to continue to grow.

The Address

•(1645)

Hon. David Emerson: Mr. Speaker, the hon. member's question is a good one. I absolutely agree that the border is critical. The border has again become an impediment to trade with the United States. It had faded as an impediment for many years and after 9/11 it resurfaced as an impediment.

In my view, there are two things we need to do. One is to strive to improve our competitiveness in terms of Canadian industry. I saw that in softwood lumber, where we were punished by 27% duties by American protectionists. Nevertheless, the industry hunkered down, made investments in technology and improved its efficiency. Today the forest industry has again become strong and healthy in spite of those protectionist actions.

I think the hon. member would have to agree that the improvement of efficiencies at the border will take a while. Some of those improvements have begun, but there will be more to come.

There is an awful lot going on with the smart border initiative, as the member knows. A lot of it will involve technology. It will involve working through some of the nuances of getting along with the American and Canadian border officials, who do not operate in quite the same way and do not have quite the same culture. We need to make some infrastructural investments to ensure we have preclearance facilities, for example, in some transportation corridors where we have some bottlenecks.

We have a lot of work to do. We have made some progress and we will make more in the next year or two.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Odina Desrochers (Lotbinière—Chutes-de-la-Chaudière, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I listened carefully to what the industry minister had to say about the throne speech. I would like to point out to him some sizeable gaps in the throne speech, which made no reference to a number of industries.

As we know, several regions of Quebec, and especially the Chaudières-Appalaches area, are facing a crisis in the textile industry. I have not seen one reference to it in the throne speech and I have not heard one statement on how the government would provide assistance to an industry hard hit by the unfair competition of Asian countries.

I would like to hear the industry minister's opinion on this.

[*English*]

Hon. David Emerson: Mr. Speaker, I have to say that there are many sectors that were not specifically named in the throne speech, so the textiles and apparel sector is not alone.

I remember working in Ottawa in the 1970s when the textile industry was basically being buried as a sunset industry, yet we still have a strong and transforming textile and apparel industry today. The government has committed to a \$60 million program of support to the textile industry. My own department has a \$26.7 million program and funding is now starting to flow. I believe it is a sector that will transform, will be successful and will continue to employ people both in Quebec and in other parts of Canada.

Hon. Andy Scott (Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development and Federal Interlocutor for Métis and Non-Status

Indians, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I congratulate you on your new position. The House, I am sure, is going to miss some of your more lyrical interventions during members' statements, but I think they will probably be missed less on this side of the House than on the other.

[*Translation*]

I would also like to take this opportunity to welcome to the House the new members of Parliament.

•(1650)

[*English*]

To all new members, I look forward to working together as we tackle probably some of the most challenging problems facing this country.

I am proud that the throne speech provides such a strong commitment to addressing the legitimate concerns of first nations, Métis and Inuit Canadians, that it speaks so directly to the need to forge a new relationship with Canada's aboriginal communities based on trust, respect and collaboration.

We are under no illusions that the problems of the past centuries will be solved in the next few months, but we are making progress. Indeed, the past year has seen extraordinary progress and impressive momentum. Building on a 2004 throne speech, a new committee of cabinet, dedicated specifically to first nations, Inuit, Métis and northerners' issues and chaired by the Prime Minister, has been created and begun its work.

The engagement, commitment and determination of the Prime Minister to advance first nations, Inuit, Métis and northerners' issues provides real hope for change. As early as last March he met with the leaders of the national aboriginal organizations, the Assembly of First Nations, the Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami organization, the Métis National Council, the Native Women's Association of Canada and the Congress of Aboriginal Peoples to listen to their concerns and solicit ideas.

This was followed by an aboriginal people's round table, held in April, which was co-chaired again by the Prime Minister, attended by 75 aboriginal organizations, 22 cabinet minister and members of Parliament.

Just a few weeks ago we saw a substantial result of that, addressing issues relating to first nations, Inuit and Métis health and the special circumstances faced in terms of the health of northerners at the special meeting of the first ministers and aboriginal leaders in Ottawa. Previously, in his reply to the Speech from the Throne, the Prime Minister confirmed his commitment to another first ministers meeting with aboriginal leaders.

Moreover, the important role of interlocutor for the Métis people has for the first time been vested in the Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development, creating an unprecedented opportunity to put Métis issues at the very forefront of the national aboriginal agenda.

The Address

Emerging from the Canada aboriginal peoples round table were six key priorities: health, housing, lifelong learning, accountability, economic opportunity and negotiation. In each of these a process has been initiated, co-chaired by a member of cabinet, which will involve all partners in a collaborative effort to move the yardsticks and make tangible progress.

Let me touch just quickly on each of these areas.

First, with respect to health, as I mentioned, the special meeting of first ministers recognized the need to address unique challenges. The government agreed to establish an aboriginal health transition fund and committed to an aboriginal health human resources initiative to encourage more first nations, Inuit, Métis and northerners to choose health care professions and improve the retention of health care workers serving aboriginal people.

Second, with respect to housing, many members in this place have seen first-hand the third world living conditions that are a daily reality for far too many first nations and Inuit people. We need to increase the supply of and access to affordable housing. We need to be more creative in how we finance and deliver first nations, Inuit and Métis and northerners' housing. I am very encouraged by some of the innovative ideas that national Chief Fontaine has proposed following the round table. We also need to develop new approaches to housing so that more market capital can be accessed to build and maintain homes, while respecting the prerogatives of the collectivity.

Third, with respect to education, we have a long way to go to close the educational gap. However, to be sure, instruments in the past number of years have had a tangible impact on the overall level of aboriginal educational attainment. We need to encourage more first nations, Inuit, Métis and northerners to pursue post-secondary education, acquiring the skills and credentials that are so vital to success.

Fourth, with respect to economic opportunity, our goal must be nothing less than to build a country that includes all of its people in its prosperity. We cannot be prosperous without opportunity. For aboriginal people that means growing up in a community with the possibility of building something better for themselves and their children.

Fifth, with respect to accountability, accountability is the hallmark of democratic government; the simple but essential notion that government should be responsible for the moneys it spends. We are proposing the creation of an aboriginal report card, a way of measuring progress against defined objectives. I hasten to add that the report card will be about accountability for everyone.

● (1655)

Sixth is the important area of negotiations of land claims, treaties and self-government agreements. I am very optimistic that together with our aboriginal, provincial and territorial partners, we can make real progress to advance in this crucial area.

In all these areas progress will be made if there really is good will to make a difference, to move beyond the old debates and help create a better future.

Of course, the six initiatives I have discussed today are not the sum total of our efforts. We know, for example, there are tremendous opportunities in the north. To achieve our joint objectives in the north, we need a strategy developed in collaboration with northerners and the Inuit community.

We also recognize the particular challenges faced by many first nations, Inuit, Métis and northern women. The NWAC sisters and spirit campaign is a particularly poignant reminder of deeply rooted wrongs. We will work with NWAC and others to ensure aboriginal women a place of honour and dignity in the life of the country.

It is too often the nature of this profession to lower expectations and dampen enthusiasm. However, I believe we really have reached a decisive moment, a time when we redress fundamental problems too long ignored and render fundamental dignities too long withheld. It is high time to finish the job that was started with the confederation of our country. That work has begun. Our commitment is clear. The momentum is building and the time is now.

Mr. Jim Prentice (Calgary Centre-North, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member will be familiar with the position I put forward in the context of the throne speech debate, and I will reiterate the issue I raised at that time. In the throne speech, at page 14, there is reference to the circumstances of other people elsewhere in the world and the government purports to offer this advice to people elsewhere in the world:

In so many of the world's trouble spots, establishing order is only the first step. Poverty, despair and violence are usually rooted in failed institutions of basic governance and rule of law.

The throne speech carries on to offer advice to people elsewhere in the world. Taking that advice and applying it closer to home, what specifically does the government propose to do to address the issues which the government itself recognizes in the throne speech? The throne speech talks about the yawning gaps that exist between the life expectancies in terms of issues such as teenage suicide, fetal alcohol syndrome and the like, and between aboriginal Canadians and non-aboriginal Canadians.

The throne speech, however, offers no specifics, no plan, no plan of action, nothing other than a vague promise to try to measure the circumstances by which aboriginal Canadians are suffering these problems.

This is not the first time we have heard this from the government. If one were to look at the throne speeches that we have seen time and again over the past 12 years, it is a reiteration of the same difficulties. If we were to look at the throne speech of 1993, it chronicles the aboriginal frustrations of the day: unemployment, health problems, poor housing, unequal educational opportunity and unsafe drinking water.

The Address

Twelve years later there is no change, and the most recent throne speech acknowledges that. In the intervening 12 years we have had throne speech after throne speech which offered nothing but vague promises, promises to forge partnerships, to build partnerships, to develop partnerships and to turn the corner on what the government itself calls the shameful living conditions of aboriginal Canadians.

What has changed? Clearly nothing has changed. What specifics does the government intend to embark upon to address these issues?

• (1700)

Hon. Andy Scott: Mr. Speaker, I welcome the intervention of the member for Calgary Centre and my Conservative critic. I know he brings an enormous background in the files that he will be engaged in debate, and I appreciate that. I would also in his absence recognize the Bloc critic who spoke earlier. I paid particular attention to his intervention.

In terms of the characterization of this throne speech, the last two have been within a year, as offering nothing new, for the first time since the early eighties the community and the Government of Canada have engaged in a very meaningful way. The round table last April was historic. I was there as the minister of infrastructure and housing and the atmosphere at the time was optimistic and engaged. We are talking about 75 national organizations representing not only the aboriginal communities at a national level, but representing the communities themselves.

As a result of that, to speak to the question of specifics, this collaboration led to the establishment of six areas for action. I mentioned them in the speech, but I will not repeat them. This is a collaborative exercise. If we are going to treat the community with the kind of respect we talk of, then there is a responsibility to collaborate in a way that has been evidenced since the round table. In Winnipeg on November 13-14, for example, I and a hundred others will be specifically putting down action plans in terms of both early childhood and K to 12 education, just to use one example.

The other round tables have resulted in the accord in terms of aboriginal health. A meeting was held in conjunction with the first ministers meeting on health. Again, the community will say that it was the first time in many years that it has been so engaged.

We have to work together. These problems have been long-standing, as I said, over centuries. However, there is a genuine desire to get on with this and I encourage members of the House of Commons here today to help me in that task.

Ms. Helena Guergis (Simcoe—Grey, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I will be splitting my time with the member for Langley.

I will begin by thanking the residents of Simcoe—Grey for electing me to represent their interests in the House of Commons. As all members will know, it truly is an honour to be given such a responsibility and trust by the residents of our home communities. I look forward to giving them representation that reflects their goals and wishes, representation that treats their tax dollars responsibly and representation that includes consultation, not simply explanation on how things are going to be.

As many of my colleagues have so far, I would also like to comment on the throne speech. Millions of Canadians expected action on the gun registry, democratic reform, agriculture, BSE, tax

relief and a modernized and effective military, as well as criminal justice reform. The Liberals continue to ignore these priorities.

As I am limited in time, I will raise a couple of issues that are of great concern to my riding and of course to Canadians across the country.

Two issues of great importance to the residents of Simcoe—Grey concern the BSE crisis and the lack of adequate infrastructure funding.

Sadly, the throne speech gives the BSE issue barely a mention and, on helping municipalities, it takes a step backward from the great Liberal election promises of the past. My constituents want to know why they had to wait more than three months for a document totally lacking in hope and vision.

As we have seen in throne speeches of the past, the Liberals have mastered the art of empty promises. There is nothing new in the speech. It recycles the same old warmed over promises we have heard for a decade in other throne speeches and election platforms.

In a quick flip through *Hansard* we will find these promises and schemes dating back years. Unfortunately, we will not find follow up action or solutions to problems that continue to affect Canadians.

As we heard last Thursday night during the emergency debate on BSE, Canada's beef producers are in a desperate state and yet the government continues to fumble around for answers and solutions. The government failed to prepare Canada for an eventual case of BSE. We could have solved the problem ahead of time. Now we have all had to live with the consequences. The government continues to fail our cattle producers, lacking the competence to get our borders fully open to export.

In my riding of Simcoe—Grey we have many cattle farmers. I told some of the heartbreaking stories of the many farmers who have lost their way of life during the emergency debate. Kandy was an example. She was a seed stock farmer and 75% of her herd were American sales. She has sold off a registered herd that she spent all her life developing. With the border closed she had no choice.

I also talked about the majority of the compensation money going to the processors. My constituents do not understand how this could have happened and they fully expect that this will happen again.

The response from the minister was that the government had tried to manage the program properly and that it had wanted to audit the processors' books. We already know where the money went. It is clearly because of the government's inability to manage our tax dollars wisely; its inability to manage the compensation program wisely.

The Address

When it comes to providing funding to municipalities to help them rebuild their roads, sewers and other public services, the government continues to slide. What happened to the great promises of reliable funding? What has happened to promise to transfer a dedicated portion of gas tax revenue? Has it disappeared until the next election?

In my riding, as in ridings across the country, we have a serious need for renewal. Aging infrastructure combined with a growing population has tied the hands of local governments. They need help and they need it now. They need the gas tax revenues to be distributed equally across the nation, not just be focused on cities and public transit.

In the Georgian triangle region, which includes the town of Blue Mountains, it will have issued one million building permits by the end of this year. It needs the dollars to support this infrastructure. In the Georgian triangle area it gets 50,000 to 200,000 visitors per day during peak seasons, weekends and holidays in the priority urban and emerging centres.

We also have Wasaga Beach in my riding. In a census Statistics Canada has recently established that this is the fastest growing municipality in Ontario and it is the fourth fastest growing municipality in Canada with a total growth of 8% per year, and this is due to migrating urban populations. It needs the dollars to support its infrastructure.

Also, in another area of my riding, Essa township, there are 500 residents who have to pay \$6,000 per household to upgrade their sewers and water mains. This is over and above the taxes that they pay every year.

•(1705)

I was very pleased and very much supported the amendments to which my leader forced the government to respond. We forced the government to respond to the real priorities of Canadians. These issues are now on the public agenda because of the initiative taken by my leader. It is unprecedented for such substantive amendments to be made to a throne speech.

As a result of our amendments, the government has committed itself to a vote in the House of Commons before a decision is made on missile defence, an assurance it had previously refused to provide. I must admit though that I was a little concerned when I read what the government House leader said:

The vote is non-binding. It's advisory in nature. Parliament will have that debate and provide that advice to the government, and ultimately the government will decide—

To me it sounds as though the government will continue to govern as though it has a majority. This is unacceptable.

We have successfully made the point to the government that it must consult with opposition parties and take their views into account to make this minority Parliament work. We, as Conservatives, understand and have taken the clear message that we will work to make this minority government work.

Hon. Don Boudria (Glengarry—Prescott—Russell, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I want to take the opportunity to congratulate the member on her first speech and on her election as well.

I would like to know whether she is as upset as my constituents are with the comments of her leader regarding what some have described as the waffling of Canada or the converting of it to a Belgium-like system.

I would draw to her attention a press release which states, “The Canadian Centre on Minority Affairs has described the opposition leader...on qualified support for the Action démocratique du Québec proposal for the weakening of the federal system as opportunistic and irresponsible at the time when the majority of Canadians supports the strengthening of our federal system”. It goes on with this criticism.

Not only are the Francophone minorities, which I represent, the English speaking minority in Quebec, who are also greatly concerned, but now the multicultural community is equally upset with the comments of the Leader of the Opposition.

Does she support the Leader of the Opposition in his quest to dismantle Canada in the way with which we are now familiar?

•(1710)

Ms. Helena Guergis: Madam Speaker, what my constituents are really angry about is the sponsorship scandal. What they are angry about is that they have to pay \$6,000 out of their own pockets when this \$100 million is lost and handed out to Liberal friendly ad agencies.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Benoît Sauvageau (Repentigny, BQ): Madam Speaker, I want to congratulate the hon. member for Simcoe—Grey on her maiden speech in this House. I would like to ask her a question about one of the points of the amendment that were put forward by her party and that we support. The second point of the amendment aims at reducing the tax burden on low income middle-class families.

I would like her to explain how she would like this second point of the Conservative Party's amendment to be implemented and tell us who stands to benefit the most from those tax cuts and the reduction of the tax burden for the middle class.

[*English*]

Ms. Helena Guergis: Madam Speaker, I would suggest that personal income tax cuts would be appropriate so that it is fair across the board for all Canadians.

Mr. Charlie Penson (Peace River, CPC): Madam Speaker, I congratulate the member for her maiden speech in the House. She did an excellent job.

She raised some interesting subjects. She asked the question about tax relief, which is something that is long overdue in this country. We have a government on the other side that has raised taxes something like 80 times in the last 10 years. It seems to me that the government has no lessons to teach anyone in the House regarding the need for tax relief.

Low and medium income families are struggling these days to make ends meet. I would like my colleague to address a little more fully about how both parents are having to work to support the income habits of a government that needs to raise taxes all the time to support its friends.

The Address

Ms. Helena Guergis: Madam Speaker, in one part my riding of Simcoe—Grey there are many single parent families. Providing those families with personal income tax relief and changing the tax brackets, as we had recommended during the last election campaign, would be a welcome opportunity to help them deal with their bills on a daily basis.

We also talked about reducing the taxes on gas because of the driving they have to do for their jobs. In a rural riding like Simcoe—Grey there is no public transit. People must rely on their cars to get to their jobs and that would appreciate some of the tax being removed from gas.

• (1715)

Mr. Mark Warawa (Langley, CPC): Madam Speaker, I would like to congratulate you on your appointment. It is an honour to speak before you today. This is my first opportunity to speak in the House.

I would like to thank the wonderful people of Langley for the honour to represent them in this 38th Parliament. My commission is to represent them, and it is about them and their needs that I want to speak about today. I am honoured to be Langley's first member of Parliament because Langley finally has its own riding. I would also like to thank my wonderful wife, children and family for their support and prayers.

Canadians across this country continue to be concerned about health care, our environment, transportation needs and crime. These are just some of the issues I will be working on on behalf of my constituents in Langley.

It is appropriate that I should make my maiden speech in reply to a throne speech that should be dedicated to defining and reforming the government's role in a modern society. I am here today to represent my constituency and to stand up for an ideal, the power of our action together to create a more equal and productive society.

As an elected representative, I am the conduit for communication between the residents of Langley and Parliament. As such I have included a few quotes from some students at Langley Meadows Elementary School. They share with us why Langley is such a great place to live.

Selassie said, "I like Langley because it has many beautiful and nice nature places to go. It is great because it has water parks, ice rinks, restaurants, stores and so many other fun stuff. It is big, but not like a city".

Partik said, "I think that Langley is such a great town because it is nice and peaceful which is really what more people want. Here in Langley the parks are nice and relaxing".

Ben said, "Langley is a wonderful city. The schools are great. Our school has nice teachers and we get a good education. In our school we have good computers and we get to stay on them for a long time. We also get awesome field trips".

Perhaps one of these young community advocates will one day take up a seat in the House to represent Langley with so much heart and goodwill.

Langley is actually two communities with rich heritage and great diversity, Langley City and the Township of Langley. The first nations people, the Sto:lo, are thought to have been the principal occupants of most of the Fraser Valley throughout the last several millennia.

The Langley Township area was where the European settlement was first established. Fort Langley, built in 1827, achieved global attention during the Fraser Valley gold rush. The crown colony of British Columbia was created in 1858, thus Fort Langley was proclaimed the birthplace of British Columbia.

In 1873 the Township of Langley was incorporated. Langley Township is made up of various communities including Aldergrove, Brookwood, Fernridge, Fort Langley, Murrayville, Walnut Grove which is my home, Willowbrook and Willoughby. The township occupies 316 square kilometres and is now home to approximately 91,000 residents.

Langley is also known as the horse capital of B.C. Its horse industry has been valued at over \$40 million. Approximately 1,000 horse farms in Langley have produced over 6,500 horses and ponies which represents approximately 16% of the provincial total.

The original settlement of Langley City was known as Innes Corners, established by gold rush enthusiasts William and Adam Innes. In 1955 the City of Langley was incorporated as a separate municipality. In the years since then the population has grown from approximately 2,025 to approximately 25,000 today.

Combined within just 10 square kilometres, the City of Langley contains established suburban residential neighbourhoods, a natural wetland of regional significance, parkland exceeding 300 acres, high density residential development, and a beautiful pedestrian oriented downtown.

The township and city share a regional shopping centre, and one of the most active industrial and commercial land bases found in the Fraser Valley in the Lower Mainland. With a diverse economic base, including well established agricultural communities, state of the art manufacturing industries and a strong retail sector, the Langleys offer excellent potential for investment and business. A favourable tax base, a skilled labour force and the proximity of Langley to Seattle, Vancouver, and overseas markets have made Langley an attractive area for investment and development.

• (1720)

Langley is a constituency that is known as the place where city and country meet, a community of communities, and the place to be. I believe Langley is as close to an idyllic community in Canada that we can find. However, Langley does not exist in a vacuum.

In the three and a half months since I was elected, a young Langley man has been convicted of serious sex offences against young girls in our community. In another instance, an 11-year-old Langley girl was abducted by a stranger and sexually assaulted until she managed to escape her captor.

During my short tenure, I have already established priority issues to work on in the coming year: transportation, auto crime, illegal drugs and child pornography legislation without loopholes.

The Address

Transportation is a major issue in Langley. The majority of Langley residents must drive outside of the community to their jobs. This increases traffic congestion to, from and within the community, a problem which has become critical.

A rail line runs right through the middle of Langley and is one of the main contributors to traffic congestion in the central part of Langley. With the planned expansion of the Delta Port container facility, the rail traffic through Langley is expected to more than triple from 9 trains a day to a whopping 34. As it now stands, when a train cuts through the city every major intersection is blocked simultaneously, making responses from emergency vehicles impossible. This is a critical situation which must be resolved as soon as possible.

It is a high priority to secure funding for Langley rail overpasses. I believe that working with the city and township of Langley, CN and CP Rail and all levels of government, we can and will ensure that Langley residents are not just seen as collateral damage by the bureaucracy. I will be talking to the hon. Minister of Transport and the hon. Minister of State for Infrastructure and Communities with regard to this important issue.

In my past position with the Insurance Corporation of B.C., I came to realize that our federal government must lead the way in ensuring that vehicle immobilizers become standard equipment in every new vehicle registered in Canada. An immobilizer is an electronic device that prevents the vehicle from being started without the proper key.

Auto thieves target vehicles that are not protected by an immobilizer. Auto crime has reached epidemic levels and is costing Canadians almost \$600 million per year in insurance claims. The majority of vehicles being stolen are used to commit other crimes, usually by an offender with a drug addiction. I will be working on a private member's bill on this important issue.

Langley is not immune to marijuana grow ops, the illegal drug trade and prostitution. It is organized crime and drug addiction that fuels most of the crime. I intend to work with my colleagues to see detox and rehabilitation facilities established. It is time for our justice system to use mandatory sentencing and to send offenders with drug addictions to detox. I look forward to serving as a member on the justice standing committee to deal with issues like these.

Langley is located approximately 40 kilometres southeast of Vancouver. It is one of the most beautiful communities in Canada and I encourage every member to plan a visit to Langley.

I close with the words of another young student, Courtney, who said, "Come on! Come see Langley. It's a great place to live! Langley is quiet and peaceful. All the people are very nice and so are the houses. Langley is a beautiful city. I suggest you come on over and enjoy all the fun things to do". Thank you, Courtney. I could not have said it better myself.

I am honoured to be chosen to represent Langley. I believe in the potential of inclusion, the power of opportunity, honesty, accountability, and our responsibility to share it and make it available to all Canadians. For every day that the people of Langley send me to the House, that is what I will stand for. I look forward to working with my colleagues in this 38th Parliament.

Hon. Don Boudria (Glengarry—Prescott—Russell, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I listened attentively to the hon. member's speech and I do agree with him that he represents a very beautiful constituency. I had the pleasure of being there in July and stayed overnight in Hope, that is perhaps just a short distance from his riding. It is truly a beautiful area. Later I visited a number of places in B.C. and Alberta. I want to congratulate the hon. member both for his first speech and also for his election.

I asked a question of his colleague a while ago which she would not answer. Perhaps I could ask the hon. member a slightly different question to see what his constituents or perhaps he thinks of the following. The Leader of the Opposition said in a speech in Quebec City and I quote from a newspaper article:

Rather than devolving more authority to provinces in areas like cultural affairs and international relations, perhaps the federal government, working with the provinces and particularly with Quebec, could establish francophone and anglophone community institutions for jurisdictions in areas like the CRTC and the CBC, or the Francophonie, the Commonwealth and UNESCO.

Does the hon. member favour having a francophone CRTC, which would presumably only then report to the government of Quebec, and where that would leave the one million francophones living outside of Quebec? I am one of them as are two-thirds of my constituents. Perhaps a number of them are in his own constituency. I know that Radio Canada has a station in Vancouver. There are a number of stations in the Niagara Peninsula, Welland, Acadia and so on, right across the country.

Should we agree with the Leader of the Opposition's point of view that the minorities like the one I represent, and of which I am one personally, do not need to be represented?

• (1725)

Mr. Mark Warawa: Madam Speaker, I thank the hon. member for the compliments. I am glad he was able to enjoy Langley. I encourage him and all members to return.

The concerns that Langley residents have are with accountability. For me to comment on a newspaper article would be inappropriate. Canadians want a change. They want honesty and integrity. They want the government to be honest.

I want to focus on accountability. I want to know what happened in the sponsorship scandal. I want to know that our children are going to be protected. I want to have legislation that protects our children and the loopholes removed for child pornography.

Hon. Rob Nicholson (Niagara Falls, CPC): Madam Speaker, I wonder if the hon. member could comment on a subsidiary issue to the one raised by the member for Glengarry—Prescott—Russell. I too would like to congratulate the member for Langley. The citizens of Langley can be very proud of the representative that they have sent to the House. I am sure he will do an excellent job representing their interests.

The Address

The member for Glengarry—Prescott—Russell raised the question of constitutional arrangements in this country. I wonder if the member for Langley would have a comment about the present Prime Minister. I think I would find agreement that whatever else people say about the Prime Minister, one of the things we could all agree is that he has not had any original ideas whatsoever including the subject of the Constitution during his political career. I think there is probably unanimity that we have heard nothing new from the Prime Minister on that score.

Nonetheless, I wonder if the member could comment if he finds that he is in agreement with that. There have been no new proposals from the Prime Minister and indeed in the Speech from the Throne. This is a recycled version of the last four, five or six speeches. One constituent of mine said he had heard the same speech three or four times. I agreed with him. I can only take some comfort, and I hope other members can take comfort, that this is the last time that we are going to hear this Liberal Speech from the Throne. The government has run its course.

If the member has any comments or questions on that, I would appreciate hearing from him.

Mr. Mark Warawa: Madam Speaker, I believe Canadians want change and I believe and hope that the leader of the official opposition will be the new prime minister.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Réal Ménard (Hochelaga, BQ): Madam Speaker, like the hon. member for Glengarry—Prescott—Russell, I also want, and I do so with great pleasure, to congratulate all the new parliamentarians who have made their maiden speeches at this important stage of the parliamentary process: the Speech from the Throne. Under British tradition, to which the hon. member for Glengarry—Prescott—Russell is strongly attached, the Speech from the Throne is a time when the government sets the course, so to speak, for the next few years.

Let us note this historical moment, which the hon. member for Glengarry—Prescott—Russell will remember with emotion a few years from now, when, in hindsight, he will be able to appreciate the very important role played by the opposition parties in improving on the throne speech, which, let it be said in all modesty, was not very substantial.

Some may want to tell me about the role of the opposition in the British tradition. I know that the hon. member for Glengarry—Prescott—Russell normally refers to the opposition as Her Majesty's loyal opposition, and that is no doubt the proper designation. We are, of course, more or less comfortable with such slightly exaggerated references to Her Majesty.

My point is that, naturally, the role of the opposition is to improve government. This is such hard work that, at the end of each day, all the members of this House go home exasperated.

I take this opportunity to thank the voters of my riding who have allowed me to come and represent them here, in the House of Commons, for a fourth term.

The hon. member for Glengarry—Prescott—Russell, who is to some extent the father of the fight against Internet pharmacies,

knows that we will have an opportunity to work on that issue in committee.

I also want to wish good luck in particular to a certain young member who has not been known in the past for being totally non-partisan since, in a previous life, he was the president of the Liberal Party. Because of the passion and desire to serve that he is showing, I do extend to him my very best wishes. I am thinking of my neighbour to the north, the hon. member for Honoré-Mercier.

That having been said, I want to come back to the substance of the throne speech. I must say that, for the first time since I came to this House, we have before us a Speech from the Throne that has been substantially improved through amendments put forward by the opposition.

The hon. member for Glengarry—Prescott—Russell and the Minister of Foreign Affairs, my good friend the member for Papineau, will remember that shortly before the adjournment, just before the election campaign, the degree of Liberal self-confidence was particularly inappropriate. They said we would suffer losses in Quebec. I remember the members for Bourassa and Papineau saying solemnly and with unbelievable confidence that only 15 Bloc Québécois members would be elected in Quebec. Incidentally, I would like to thank Quebeckers for electing 54 Bloc Québécois members, all of whom are very keen to work to protect Quebec's interests.

Of course, when the opportunity arises, we will cooperate with the government, since there are times in a Parliament when partisanship must be set aside.

• (1730)

When the Bloc Québécois assumed leadership on seven occasions in building a coalition on very important issues, it stayed away from any partisan behaviour.

My first example is an important issue, namely the reform of the employment insurance fund. A few years ago, when employment insurance was called unemployment insurance, two thirds of our fellow citizens who were active members of the labour force qualified for benefits. All this changed when the Liberals took office in 1993 and implemented a reform that had initially been proposed by the minister at the time, Lloyd Axworthy, and then the minister from New Brunswick, who was not re-elected in 1997. Thanks to Lloyd Axworthy's work, we had a reform whereby, today, slightly more than 30% of our fellow citizens who are active members of the labour force can collect benefits when they are looking for work. Of course, we have to contribute to this insurance program. It is funded equally by employers and workers. We all understand that employment insurance is for that transition period during which people who have lost their job are looking for a new one.

How could we end up with such a reform so unfair that it was condemned by just about everyone in Quebec? It is not only sovereigntists who expressed their discontent with the employment insurance reform.

The Address

You know that eligibility criteria are extremely unfair. I think that the member for Glengarry—Prescott—Russell, who is from the progressive wing of his party, will remember how this requirement of 910 hours is unfair to young people. How can you explain that someone without experience, who often has had training, but who has not had the chance to have a first job, should have to meet such a requirement? The result is, of course, that new entrants in the program cannot qualify.

However, as concerns the extreme injustice and unfairness, can you imagine that the government was able to collect surpluses in a program that should provide workers with an income when they are looking for employment. The member for Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup—Témiscouata—Les Basques fought hard in this regard.

All this to say that there was an amendment to the Speech from the Throne, with the vigilance—

Hon. Don Boudria: No, an amendment to the Speech from the Throne cannot exist.

Mr. Réal Ménard: Madam Speaker, the member for Glengarry—Prescott—Russell, who, as we know, is very knowledgeable of parliamentary business, is telling me, through you, that an amendment to the Speech from the Throne cannot exist. He is telling us that we have taken a slightly comatose and fictitious action when we rose in the House to vote on the amendment and the amendment to the amendment.

Hon. Don Boudria: The amendment to the motion.

Mr. Réal Ménard: I know that the hon. member for Glengarry—Prescott—Russell would like to join me in congratulating all the opposition members who worked at making the Speech from the Throne fairer and more respectful of the expectations of our fellow citizens in Quebec.

Hon. Don Boudria: There is no such thing as an amendment to the throne speech.

Mr. Réal Ménard: Nevertheless, we did present an amendment to the motion inviting the government to make a reference to the Standing Committee on Human Resources, Skills Development, Social Development and the Status of Persons with Disabilities to ensure that the workers contributing to this program would be the main ones to benefit from it.

There is one other very important matter. We know that everyone who has taken an even slightly enlightened look at the key trends in Canadian federalism realizes that there is what is termed a fiscal imbalance. This imbalance is a situation in which the federal government collects far more revenue of various kinds, income and other taxes and so forth, than what it needs to use these funds for.

• (1735)

The issue was not examined by a partisan body. We are talking about the Conference Board, the equivalent of the Canadian Chamber of Commerce, if you will. It estimated that, over the next ten years, the federal government's situation could result in an accumulated surplus of \$160 billion. We are not talking about fifty years, we are talking about a decade, a timeframe within which economic forecasting can be credible and accurate.

This brings me to another issue I care a lot about, health care. It takes the cake. If we were to grade the federal government on its handling of the health file, it would get an *F*. It took the mobilization of all the provincial premiers. I would remind the member for Glengarry—Prescott—Russell that an *F* means failure.

You will recall that last year at this time every single premier, not just a Quebec sovereignist premier, were mobilizing. Every single provincial premier of Canada, Conservative, Liberal and New Democrat alike, got into the act. They bought ads in newspapers to alert public opinion to the fact that the federal government had been particularly irresponsible.

Why irresponsible? We will recall—

An hon. member: Oh, oh!

Mr. Réal Ménard: I did not get what the voluble Minister for External Affairs said. We will get back to the issue of the wall dividing Israel and Palestine and the way his government voted on it. I will mention it towards the end of my remarks and establish a link with the throne speech.

That said, through you Madam Speaker, I would like to address my remarks to the former health minister as I remember that the Foreign Affairs minister held that portfolio for a brief few months. It took ads in major newspapers across Canada to take the federal government to task for not paying its fair share.

By the way, I will add that the September conference did not solve the problem. The Romanow commission as well as the Clair and Kirby reports—eight provinces out of ten had their own working group on health care—demands a 25% share of health care expenses be borne by the federal government. With the new investment by the federal government, it will reach 23% to 24% in a good year.

If ever we needed another reason to hold a debate on sovereignty, the fact that the federal government can destabilize provincial public finance is certainly a good one. Do not think for a minute that when the current Prime Minister was minister—

Mr. Stéphane Bergeron: It is important.

Mr. Réal Ménard: Through you, Madam Speaker, I would rather not get involved in partisanship. However, I cannot help but notice something.

The Liberals had been elected in October. The Prime Minister refused to summon Parliament before January because he had to attend NATO meetings. When the current Prime Minister, who was finance minister at the time, brought down his first budget at the end of February, something was done with no warning whatsoever. Without conducting any type of negotiation with its partners in the federation, the federal government cut transfer payments to such an extent that the public finances of the various provinces became destabilized.

When Quebec achieves sovereignty, we will have just one Parliament. Quebecers—

Hon. Pierre Pettigrew: When will that be?

The Address

Mr. Réal Ménard: I cannot give the Minister of Foreign Affairs a specific date at this time.

An hon. member: Oh, oh!

Mr. Réal Ménard: It will be done in a highly democratic manner, which should reassure the hon. member for Papineau.

I cannot help but recall that in the history of the sovereigntist movement, there have been three extremely charismatic leaders who have founded political parties to ensure that sovereignty would be democratically voted on from time to time. Of course I am talking about Pierre Bourgault, René Lévesque and Lucien Bouchard. They have been among the most charismatic and knowledgeable leaders in Quebec.

• (1740)

That said, with the permission of the Minister of Foreign Affairs, I will not commit to a precise schedule, but we in both the Bloc and the Parti Québécois will not stop being optimistic about one day achieving sovereignty.

Our optimism is strengthened by the profoundly unfair policies and actions of the federal government. The potential for destabilizing public finances by cutting into transfer payments as was done in 1994, 1995 and 1996 helps Quebecers understand why sovereignty is necessary.

I would also like to say something about health and about the agreement that was reached on September 15. Along with the member for Verchères—Les Patriotes and the member for Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot, I attended the conference of first ministers. We followed their work closely. The agreement of September 15 poses a number of problems, that is certain. We will have an opportunity to look at it again, perhaps in more depth. I made a motion in committee and it received support; we are inviting the Minister of Health to appear and explain the agreement to us.

There are problems of accountability, among others. The former health minister, who is now the Minister of Foreign Affairs, was very fond of suggesting that there was no procedure for accountability in health care in Quebec. The minister does suffer from selective amnesia. We could quote the text to him, if he wished.

I would like to tell the Minister of Foreign Affairs, whose serenity honours us, that in the National Assembly there are accountability mechanisms, such as the social affairs commission, the health commissioner and question period every day when the Assembly is in session.

I would now like to speak about a very sad matter, and I shall do so with all the solemnity it deserves. I was very sorry to hear some news yesterday. I hope that we can count on the hon. member for Glengarry—Prescott—Russell, the hon. member for Honoré-Mercier, and on all members of Parliament.

We will recall that, in 1997, Allan Rock proposed a federal-provincial-territorial agreement on the hepatitis C issue. We are well aware that some of our fellow citizens have been infected through tainted blood or blood products. The number one recommendation of the Krever commission was that hepatitis C victims not be compensated on the basis of any kind of chronology.

As we speak, there is \$1.1 billion available for compensation, of which \$200 million has been used. In all good faith, the federal government expected to reach 20,000 hepatitis C victims, but has only reached some 7,000 to date.

That is why we have to achieve a consensus on improving the compensation package, so that individuals infected before 1986 and after 1990 can be eligible. I am sure that all parliamentarians in this House will agree to give in to this demand dictated by common sense, and, fundamentally, by compassion.

• (1745)

So, this is a very troubling issue. I cannot imagine the status quo being maintained any longer. That would not make sense. We are working hard at committee.

Madam Speaker, would you ask for the unanimous consent of the House to allow me to carry on for five minutes?

• (1750)

[*English*]

The Acting Speaker (Hon. Jean Augustine): Does the hon. member have unanimous consent?

Some hon. members: No.

Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I have a brief comment and then a question. I believe that the measure of the success of a country is not an economic measure, but rather a measure of the health and well-being of its people.

I believe that the throne speech lays out in broad terms the next steps for building on that health and well-being. I believe that building Canada is an intricate and ongoing work in progress and that the throne speech must take into account where we have been, where we are and where we would like to be. It is not a laundry list or a wish list of all the members' items. Nor is it reflective of the priority of a matter if it is not mentioned in the throne speech, because the throne speech is the next step, building on where we have been.

With that as a preamble, here is my question for the member. Would the member agree that we have to continue the process of building Canada and improving the health and well-being of all Canadians?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Réal Ménard: Madam Speaker, I agree that we must continue the process of building Canada so that two nations can speak to each other as full equals, and this is the sovereignty association project.

I believe we must recognize that there is not room for two nations in the same political system. Quebec is not a province. This does not take anything away from Saskatchewan, from Prince Edward Island, from the rest of English Canada. Quebec is a nation and nations must achieve self-determination. The right to self-determination is recognized internationally.

The Address

The best thing that could happen to Quebec and to Canada would be for these two nations destined to become distinct countries to participate in the community of nations as complete equals, without borders, with a common market, and a tradition of generosity that will be a credit to our two peoples. This is the project that is very dear to the heart of the Bloc Québécois.

Mr. Pablo Rodriguez (Honoré-Mercier, Lib.): Madam Speaker, first I want to thank the member for his kind words and wishes. I want to express the same to him. I wanted to get back to what he said. I have two short questions.

First, he talked about Quebec's conditions, that is the reason why Quebecers should vote for sovereignty. He cited a few examples. However, if we solved these problems, which he calls the fiscal imbalance or whatever, would he then decide to become a federalist? That was my first question.

My second question is this: Quebecers said no twice, in 1980 and in 1995. They will probably say no again the next time. Is there a time when this process will stop or does he think that it should continue until the end of time?

Mr. Réal Ménard: Madam Speaker, I want to thank the hon. member for Honoré-Mercier for his question. As he was referring to two unsuccessful referendums, I thought, at first, that he was talking about Newfoundland. I now understand that he was referring to Quebec.

Democracy is not a process of slow combustion. In a democracy, when politicians are elected on the basis of their political agenda, the people expect them to do what they were elected for. I know that some people may be against sovereignty. However, the Parti Québécois has never hid its true intentions. Every time it held a referendum, it had a clear mandate to do so.

On the issue of asymmetrical federalism, I want to point out that we do not want a piecemeal approach where we would be granted one, two or three powers. We want all the powers, and I do not think this is possible under the current federal system.

I would like the hon. member for Honoré-Mercier to think about this: does he know of a nation which achieved sovereignty and then gave it up? Once Quebecers come face to face with their destiny and opt for sovereignty, I believe they will never give it up. However, since we have some values in common with English Canada, we will share some of the powers with them, where it is useful to do so. We have always talked, of course, about a common currency and a common economic market, and that is part of our project.

• (1755)

[English]

Mr. Werner Schmidt (Kelowna—Lake Country, CPC): Madam Speaker, I was really rather surprised that the hon. member who just spoke in answer to another question said that Quebec is a "nation". I wonder if the member could define what he means by nation. There are different ways, I suppose, in which we can define nation, but I thought Quebec was a province of Canada and I thought Canada was a federation of all the provinces working together.

He also made the observation that Quebec takes nothing from the rest of Canada. I would like to ask him, then, about what has

happened over the years where that cooperative element has in fact worked, where indeed the tax structure has created situations where there may have been a fiscal imbalance, and I am sure there is, but the fact still remains that Quebec was a beneficiary of certain financial agreements and arrangements that exist within Canada.

Could the member explain a little more clearly exactly what he means by Quebec being a nation?

[Translation]

Mr. Réal Ménard: Madam Speaker, I thank my colleague for his question.

In international law and as sovereignists have been explaining for three decades already, what makes a nation is very clear. There are five essential elements: a vernacular language, which is, in our case, French, among others; effective control over a territory; a people demonstrating a will to live together; democratic institutions; and a history.

Very simply put, this is what a nation is. Nations have a right to self-determination. Two international conventions recognize this. This is why Quebec is destined to become a sovereign state in the world, which will not prevent it from forging associative links as determined by its interests and common values.

I am very surprised that our colleague has not realized that Quebec is a nation, since we have cast the net wide. When we maintain that Quebec is a nation, it is something that is not unanimous, but there is a relative consensus in Quebec.

[English]

Mr. Michael Chong (Wellington—Halton Hills, CPC): Madam Speaker, the member mentioned the criteria in international law for what constitutes a nation. One of the elements of that criteria is geography. Could the member comment on the fact that a significant portion of Quebec's geography is occupied by native peoples, specifically around James Bay by the Cree nations. How does he see this issue relating to the territorial integrity of Quebec?

[Translation]

Mr. Réal Ménard: Madam Speaker, perhaps our hon. colleague will remember this man named René Lévesque, who, in the early 1980s, recognized the nation status of 11 first nations.

Quebec is a pretty good model when it comes to its relations with the first nations. As sovereignists, we have always acknowledged that we need to have a relationship, cooperation and special recognition for the first nations. I think that the policies put in place by René Lévesque and his successors ought to be an inspiration for all the members of this House who are respectful of the rights of the first nations.

• (1800)

Mr. Pablo Rodriguez: Madam Speaker, the hon. member is seeing the whole thing with a great deal of optimism when he says that we will agree on just about everything, that we will have a common currency, that there will be no borders, that there will be a comprehensive treaty between Quebec and Canada. He is putting on very rose-coloured glasses to look at a hypothetical situation.

I have a very short question. Does the hon. member realize that, prior to building his country, he must first destroy mine?

The Address

Mr. Réal Ménard: Madam Speaker, I will simply say two things. Obviously, the hon. member cannot criticize me for being optimistic by nature, even very optimistic.

I know he will understand that the right to self-determination belongs to the people of Quebec and that the rest of Canada will understand that it is in its best interests to be part of a common market and to ensure that the junction of our respective interests benefits both sides.

Indeed, I do think it is possible to build a new country on the basis of an association.

[*English*]

Mrs. Susan Kadis (Thornhill, Lib.): Madam Speaker, I am very pleased to rise today in this historic House as the second member of Parliament for the riding of Thornhill. I take this privilege and trust very seriously and will work to re-earn their trust. I am a voice for all my constituents because everyone deserves a voice.

Having a father who at 15 years old fought for the Algonquin regiment of the Canadian forces in World War II, I say in his memory today, I am very proud to serve in this House. I would like to acknowledge the hard work of my predecessor, the Hon. Elinor Caplan, and her longstanding dedication to public service.

I represent a riding that is very dynamic and diverse in nature, a community of multi-generational families, a community rich in volunteers, present and past, including Craig Kielburg of Free the Children, and a community that I believe represents the very best of Canada. In many ways Thornhill is Canada and Canada is Thornhill.

One prime example is Mosaic, a grassroots interfaith organization which is both unique and notable. Fundamental to its mandate is the very underpinning of the values of Canada, the values of inclusion, respect and equality, values which must be continuously reinforced and defended, particularly at this time in history. I was very heartened by the strong and definitive message regarding zero tolerance hate and hate crimes contained in the throne speech. This is clearly one of those times in history that requires courageous and proactive leadership to ensure that there will be no comfort level for hate in any form.

In this regard, among other initiatives, we need to direct funds to our schools to teach our children at the earliest possible stage anti-hate and anti-racism education to ensure history is not repeated and maintain our credibility as a just society. These types of measures, along with others, will ensure that the Charter of Rights and Freedoms continues to guide our way of life. Any attempt to erode or compromise our charter must be fought vigorously. There is too much at stake.

I am particularly pleased to hear in the Speech from the Throne our government's strong resolve to reaffirm our commitment to improve and safeguard our long admired health care system. This is essential and goes to the heart of what Canada is all about. As an 11 year breast cancer survivor, I, along with my government, am steadfastly committed to implementing this objective. I was very fortunate to receive state of the art treatment and care in a very timely fashion. Unfortunately, this is not always the case today.

Cancer, like many other catastrophic diseases does not simply affect the individual but profoundly affects entire families and generations. I sat recently in the home of one of my constituents. She told me her surgery and treatment may be delayed. This is totally unacceptable. Simply put, we must ensure that we get back to the previous level of service, and I am confident that we will.

Our throne speech, with its emphasis on reducing wait times and reforming primary care, shows that we get it. Our groundbreaking comprehensive approach, including encouraging prevention and healthier lifestyles, combined with clear targets and evidence-based benchmarks, bodes well for us being successful in this most critical area. This is also part and parcel of our demonstrated commitment to strengthen accountability in all areas of government. The bottom line is, my constituents want to know that when their children or their parents they are caring for need timely health care, they receive it.

As a former city councillor, I have worked on the front lines to improve transit and transportation infrastructure and build healthy, safe and sustainable communities and cities. I am very pleased that enshrined in the throne speech is our plan to allocate a portion of the gas tax to improve our cities and communities across Canada. Just in the city of Vaughan alone, our current local roads and sewer water main infrastructure needs list is approximately \$100 million, and this is repeated across Canada. This significant commitment also signals a new spirit of cooperation. Any barriers that diminish the quality of life of Canadians must be eradicated. Having the privilege of serving on the national caucus cities and communities committee and being the new chair of the GTA caucus, I look forward with great enthusiasm to advancing our government's initiatives in this area.

My constituents and Canadians everywhere welcome this direction, which puts them first and casts aside self-serving counterproductive partisan positions that divide us. They expect us to work together, all parliamentarians, building on our best assets, our people, our values and our unique and cherished way of life, one for which is certainly worth fighting.

It is about time that all levels of government worked together to find solutions that affect Canadian lives on a daily basis. This refreshing approach, embraced across the country, is resonating everywhere. Its benefits will be multiple and far reaching. Let us build on this model.

Our forward thinking approach is reflected in the throne speech, which encourages increased clean and renewable energy. Our intent to strengthen and increase our current wind power initiatives is particularly positive and underscores our growing commitment to take responsibility for our environment.

The Address

I would like to extend my wholehearted support for our government's plan to implement a national early learning and child care system. As a mother of five grown children and former school trustee, I know how important this initiative is and what it will mean to all of us in our futures in our families. This, coupled with the forthcoming assistance to seniors and caregivers of people with disabilities, speaks volumes about the respect and support for those who have contributed so much to our society.

● (1805)

We have many inspiring examples in my riding of senior clubs that are enriching our community. To name a few, we have the Garibaldi Seniors, the Pinecrest Seniors, Centre Street Seniors, Thornhill Seniors in Vaughan and the new seniors facility in Thornhill Markham. I applaud them all.

As a member of the new status of women's committee, I am very pleased that our government will be bringing forward legislation to protect women against the trafficking of persons. This is absolutely vital to the well-being and security of women here and around the world.

Our throne speech heralds a new era, a new way of thinking, a new way of doing business, a reaffirmation of the best that we have achieved in the past and a recognition of the changing needs and climate of today.

Canadians want us to succeed. Our goals are lofty as they must be and are facilitated by a bright fiscal picture which will allow us to continue to pay down the debt and at the same time invest in essential services, strengthening our foundations and improving the quality of life for all Canadians. Canadians are relying on us to achieve these goals. We cannot afford not to. There is too much at stake.

We have been charged to follow this course and we have walked through the door with great hope and promise. We are not turning back.

Hon. Don Boudria (Glengarry—Prescott—Russell, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want congratulate the hon. member on her election to the House of Commons. On behalf of I am sure all my Liberal colleagues, and perhaps even all colleagues, we want her to have a very long parliamentary career. We know she succeeds a member of Parliament who was truly outstanding and we know she will be just as successful in representing the people of Thornhill and, indeed, all Canadians.

In the hon. member's she very eloquently raised the issues involving health care. Those are issues with which I very much agree.

One issue that was raised earlier by another member was additional funding that may be available for those people who suffered from contaminated blood prior to 1986. Our minister has indicated his willingness to reopen that file. I hope he and his provincial counterparts, because this was a federal-provincial agreement, are willing to reopen this issue to assist the victims of hepatitis prior to 1986.

Has my colleague in her brief tenure here had representation from constituents who are also victims? Does she agree with me that this

is indeed a good process? The Minister of Health is on the right track. He has said that he wants to reopen the file with the provinces. Will she join me in supporting the Minister of Health in doing just that.

● (1810)

Mrs. Susan Kadis: Madam Speaker, I wholeheartedly support the direction that we are taking. I believe everyone in the House does.

Mr. Randy Kamp (Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge—Mission, CPC): Madam Speaker, it looks like I may have the last word in this throne speech debate. I have been married for 30 years and I am not really used to that.

Since this is my maiden speech in this distinguished House, let me take this opportunity to thank the constituents of Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge—Mission for the honour they have bestowed on me to represent them in this 38th Parliament. I am keenly aware that I serve at their pleasure.

I would like to offer my sincere thanks to the team of volunteers and donors who assisted with my campaign. I would like to think that I was elected because of my sparkling personality, but probably not. We have all come to realize that politics is a team game and I would not be here without their support.

I would like to thank my family, my wife Ruth, my children, Mark, Melanie and Adam and their spouses, who have been with me on this journey. I appreciate their support and encouragement. I thank my parents, Peter and Evelyn Kamp, who have modelled for me that success in life is about giving, not getting. I appreciate that.

Finally, let me thank the previous member of Parliament, Grant McNally, who served us well at considerable personal sacrifice and with whom I had the privilege of working for seven years. It is clear that he was well liked by members from both sides of the House, so I will have big shoes to fill. In fact I think some of his colleagues are afraid that I will not adequately take his place, especially the group that meets regularly at D'arcy McGee's. That fear I think is probably justified.

In my opinion, the riding of Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge—Mission is the most beautiful riding in Canada. Some may differ with that, but if people had grown up there, as I did, or even visited there, I think they would come to agree.

It is the hometown of Larry Walker, probably the best right fielder in baseball. It is nestled between the north side of the Fraser River, which used to have fish in it, and the spectacular Golden Ears Mountains. There people will find three growing communities, microcosms really of our country, vigorous business communities co-existing alongside rural areas with farms that still produce and ditches that still croak.

Time is short so let me go directly to the throne speech.

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Sometimes it is good to read the last page of a book before starting at the beginning to see how it turns out. If people do that with this speech, here is what they will find. If people go to the last page, they will find the claim that the government's agenda is based on a comprehensive strategy to do three things: one, to build a prosperous and sustainable 21st century economy for Canada; two, to strengthen the country's social foundations; and three, to secure for Canada a place of pride and influence in the world.

I wish I had time to comment on each of these three because they are all important.

Regarding the first, I think fulfilling our fiduciary responsibility is probably the most important task we have. Regarding the third, it is also a very important subject and I think some of us will have an opportunity to speak to that tomorrow. Because time is really short, let me focus on the second.

According to the government's claim, it has a comprehensive strategy to strengthen the country's social foundations. This of course should be of great importance to us all because history has shown us that it is impossible to build a prosperous, influential country without strong social foundations.

What does the speech reveal to us about the government's comprehensive agenda? There is a large section on health, and I will not speak too much about that. It is more a band-aid than a fix for a generation. I do not know if it will solve the personnel problems. We need doctors and nurses.

The speech also mentions in a single sentence the government's commitment to improving home and community care to safe and affordable drugs. There are some first steps in that area, but nowhere near the promises made during the election campaign.

Of course there is that promise that we have heard again and again for a national system for child care and early childhood training. I find it perplexing that the same government that claims to care so much about children cannot seem to produce loophole-free legislation which protects our children from child pornography.

Let me comment briefly in closing on what I did not find. Some of us have been chagrined to realize that our election makes us politicians.

• (1815)

The Speaker: It being 6:15 p.m., it is my duty to interrupt the proceedings and put forthwith every question to dispose of the motion now before the House. I regret having to interrupt the hon. member.

Right Hon. Paul Martin: Mr. Speaker, I believe you would find there is agreement in the House to unanimously adopt the motion for the address in reply to the Speech from the Throne as amended.

The Speaker: Is there unanimous consent to adopt the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Speaker: I declare the motion, as amended, carried.

(Motion, as amended, agreed to)

[*Translation*]

Hon. Tony Valeri (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, Lib.) moved:

That the Address be engrossed and presented to Her Excellency the Governor General by the Speaker.

(Motion agreed to)

[*English*]

The Speaker: The House has completed its proceedings. Is there agreement to proceed with the debate on the adjournment motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

ADJOURNMENT PROCEEDINGS

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

[*English*]

FISHERIES

Mr. Loyola Hearn (St. John's South—Mount Pearl, CPC): Mr. Speaker, a couple of weeks ago in the House I asked the Prime Minister a question which, at that time, was answered by the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans. I asked why the Prime Minister had turned his back—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order, please. The hon. member for St. John's South—Mount Pearl has the floor and it is impossible to hear with all the conversations going on in the chamber. I would invite hon. members who are carrying on discussions in the House to conduct those in the lobby. The hon. member for St. John's South—Mount Pearl now has the floor.

• (1820)

Mr. Loyola Hearn: Mr. Speaker, as I was saying, I asked the Prime Minister why he had gone back on his commitment to deal with the overfishing issue off the coast of Newfoundland and Labrador, particularly on the nose and tail of the Grand Banks and the Flemish Cap.

During the election, the Prime Minister made a commitment to deal with the overfishing “even if it meant taking custodial management”. When I asked why he and the government had done nothing since, the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans replied, “Our process that we are using is working. We have had 130 boardings this year. There are fewer boats out there and we are finding fewer discrepancies”.

The average person might buy that, and even statistics to a point at this time of the year might prove that statement true, but overall it is not the case.

If we go back just a couple of months before the election, the same minister was up telling us that we had increased our activity out there, that we had put out more patrols, that we had done more boarding and found more blatant abuses and that we had to do something about it.

Adjournment Proceedings

The Liberals cannot have it both ways. They have already admitted that they found more abuses. If there are fewer abuses it has only been recently, since the election, and I will tell the House why. First, they are looking for an excuse to back off on the commitment. Second, this time of the year the allocated quotas have been caught. Most of the boats have returned to their own nations or have gone fishing somewhere else. In the case of the Spanish and Portuguese, they are off the coasts of Australia, Africa, or wherever because they travel the world using vacuum cleaners to scoop up everything that swims in the ocean.

The minister is not being factual when he states that this problem is correcting itself. It is not. It is the time of year when we would expect less activity in this area and, consequently, fewer abuses. The problem is that the government has done absolutely nothing to deal with this serious situation.

The parliamentary secretary, undoubtedly, will be answering for the minister who should be answering for himself, who in turn answers for the Prime Minister who should be answering because he was the one who committed to deal with the issue. The parliamentary secretary will tell us that they have had so many boardings with fewer abuses. As I say, statistics can be used any way one wants to use them, and, in this case, all he is doing is taking the time of year when there is less activity and consequently fewer abuses to rules and regulations.

However the issue has not been corrected. The only way to deal with this is for the government to take a strong stand in making sure that the rules and regulations are adhered to, that the quotas allocated by NAFO are fished but not overfished and that species under moratoria are protected. This can be done in two ways: by the government doing it itself, or by showing some leadership within the international organizations to get others to work with us for that benefit.

I look forward with interest to the parliamentary secretary's answer.

Hon. Shawn Murphy (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the opportunity to rise on behalf of the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans to address the concerns raised by the hon. member for St. John's South—Mount Pearl.

At the centre of this evening's debate is the member's concern with overfishing in international waters off the Atlantic Ocean and outside Canada's 200 mile limit, specifically as it affects the conservation and rebuilding of straddling fish stocks on the Grand Banks.

Let me state clearly that I share the concerns of the hon. member. Let me state also that the minister shares his concerns. Let me state also that the Prime Minister shares his concerns. All Canadians share the member's concerns regarding this issue.

We recognize that overfishing is destroying fish stocks around the world, threatening the health of ocean ecosystems and damaging the economies of coastal communities right around the world. That is precisely why the Government of Canada took important steps this year to put an end to illegal fishing practices in the high seas starting with the Grand Banks.

This war has been fought on a number of fronts. We enhanced at sea surveillance and strengthened our inspection and enforcement measures. We increased diplomatic efforts. We began looking at ways to address the problem in a more permanent way through governance changes.

I submit that these efforts are reaping results. We are seeing real and significant progress in curbing illegal fishing activities in this area. I know the hon. member for St. John's South—Pearl Harbour does not agree with that but the statistics do not support his submission whatsoever.

Expanding patrol presence and vessel boardings on the nose and tail of the Grand Banks was a key first step to the strategy. About 150 vessel boardings have taken place in the last five and a half months and seven citations have been issued by Canadian inspectors. Now there is a significant decrease in the number of foreign groundfish vessels fishing in the Grand Banks. Vessels have moved to other waters.

Our goal of ending overfishing is being achieved, although we are not there yet. I agree with the hon. member that we have many miles to travel but we have certainly accomplished a lot over the last short period of time.

The message is clear to vessel owners and crews: overfishing will not be tolerated by Canada. We must remain vigilant. We will continue to exercise enforcement measures as permitted by international law because they have proven to be successful.

I want to reiterate the actions taken by our Prime Minister on this whole issue. He certainly has made this a major priority by his actions. I believe every time he gets on a plane and the plane is headed across the Atlantic Ocean, this is the number one concern on his mind.

He has addressed the United Nations on this very issue. He has met with the president of France. He has met with the president of Spain. He has met with the president of Portugal. He has met with the president of Russia. This has been the first item at all these meetings. He has put tremendous pressure on everyone. I believe we are going to see further efforts besides the United Nations at other international fora such as the G-8.

These diplomatic efforts are achieving results. Spain, for example, is showing a real willingness to work with Canada to end illegal fishing practices.

A lot of work has been done. We are making significant real progress. Our approach is working.

● (1825)

Mr. Loyola Hearn: Mr. Speaker, fishermen on the east coast of Canada who know what is happening are having the biggest laugh of their lives. This has to have been the biggest joke they have heard in quite a while, to say that the government is putting an end to illegal fishing. Just before the election, a couple of extra boats were sent out and the government held a press conference to tell people that it was going to take care of this problem.

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I do agree that there are not as many boats out there today as there were. The only reason the boats are gone is that the quotas have been capped and the boats are now fishing somewhere else. They will be back again in the spring. People know that is true.

He also said that the Prime Minister has been running around the world dealing with the issue. That is foolishness. The Prime Minister has mentioned two or three times that we have a problem with overfishing. He can talk about it all he wants, but we want to see some substantive government action. When the Prime Minister convenes a conference of these people, when the Minister of Fisheries convenes an international conference then—

The Speaker: The hon. member's time has expired, so we go back to the hon. Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Fisheries and Oceans.

• (1830)

Hon. Shawn Murphy: Mr. Speaker, I disagree totally with the assertion just made by the hon. member for St. John's South—Mount

Pearl. There have been tremendous efforts and I will repeat some of them.

There is the substantial presence of the at sea monitoring; the substantial increase in air surveillance of the whole Grand Banks area; the signing by Canada of the United Nations law of the sea last November; the signing by the European Union of the United Nations convention on highly migratory and straddling stocks; the diplomatic efforts; the address to the United Nations; and the list goes on and on. The hon. member knows full well that results are being achieved. The number of incidents of foreign overfishing has decreased significantly over the last year and that level of decreases will continue to happen.

The Speaker: It being 6:32 p.m. this House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 10 a.m., pursuant to Standing Order 24(1).

(The House adjourned at 6:32 p.m.)

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