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OFFICIAL REPORT
(HANSARD)

Tuesday, November 21, 2006

—
Speaker: The Honourable Peter Milliken

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HOUSE OF COMMONS

Tuesday, November 21, 2006

The House met at 10 a.m.

Prayers

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

• (1005)

[*English*]

GOVERNMENT RESPONSE TO PETITIONS

Mr. Tom Lukiwski (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 36(8) I have the honour to table, in both official languages, the government's response to eight petitions.

* * *

[*Translation*]

INTERPARLIAMENTARY DELEGATIONS

Mr. Bernard Patry (Pierrefonds—Dollard, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 34(1), I have the honour to present to the House, in both official languages, the report of the parliamentary delegation of the Canadian branch of the Assemblée parlementaire de la Francophonie that participated in the meeting of the Bureau of the APF in Rabat, Morocco, on June 29, 2006, and in the 32nd annual session of the APF, also held in Rabat, Morocco, from June 30 to July 3, 2006.

* * *

[*English*]

WORLD WAR I VETERANS

Mr. Peter Stoffer (Sackville—Eastern Shore, NDP): Mr. Speaker, there have been consultations between the parties and I believe you will find unanimous consent for the following motion. I move:

That, in the opinion of this House, the Government of Canada should honour all who served Canada in the first world war by sponsoring a state funeral on the passing of the last Canadian veteran of this Great War.

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. We received this request from my hon. colleague yesterday and while we would have preferred to have a discussion on the various approaches, we will support this motion since it was one of the options that the government had been considering in any event.

That said, I think it is prudent that we take the time to properly consider other options, and proceed with the most appropriate and dignified one to honour all veterans of the first world war.

The Speaker: Does the hon. member for Sackville—Eastern Shore have the unanimous consent of the House to propose this motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

(Motion agreed to)

* * *

[*Translation*]

BILL C-285—CANADA MORTGAGE AND HOUSING CORPORATION ACT

Mr. Michel Guimond (Montmorency—Charlevoix—Haute-Côte-Nord, BQ): Mr. Speaker, following discussions with my colleagues from the other parties, I think that if you were to seek it, you would easily find unanimous consent to adopt the following motion. By unanimous consent, it was ordered:

That the recorded division scheduled for Wednesday, November 22, 2006 on a motion for second reading of Bill C-285 be redeferred to Tuesday, November 28, 2006, at the expiry of the time provided for government orders.

The Speaker: Does the hon. member for Montmorency—Charlevoix—Haute-Côte-Nord have the unanimous consent of the House to move this motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

(Motion agreed to)

[*English*]

Hon. Jay Hill: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. There appears to have been a bit of miscommunication. I wonder if you would find it possible to revert to introduction of government bills.

The Speaker: Is there unanimous consent to revert to introduction of government bills?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Government Orders

Some hon. members: No.

The Speaker: There is no consent. I called introduction of government bills but nobody rose. I was not aware that there was a bill to be introduced.

Presenting petitions.

* * *

PETITIONS

LITERACY

Hon. Sue Barnes (London West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have a petition from citizens in London and Middlesex drawing the attention of the House that literacy is a prerequisite for social and economic development, that approximately 38% of Canadians have difficulty reading and writing, that illiteracy costs Canadian society approximately \$10 billion annually, and that the successful elimination of adult illiteracy is a key component in ensuring Canadian competitiveness in the global market as well as ensuring the quality of life for thousands of Canadians.

Therefore, the petitioners call upon Parliament to reinstate funding to literacy programs cut by the Conservative government and to undertake a national literacy strategy to ensure that all Canadians have the opportunity to achieve this vital skill. There are a couple of pages of signatures from my constituents who are very much in favour of funding the literacy programs in full.

MARRIAGE

Mr. Mike Allen (Tobique—Mactaquac, CPC): Mr. Speaker, pursuant to Standing Order 36 I have the pleasure to present three petitions today signed by a number of people from the riding of Tobique—Mactaquac, specifically in the Carleton Country area.

The petitioners are calling upon Parliament to reopen the issue of marriage in this Parliament and to repeal or to amend the Marriage for Civil Purposes Act in order to promote and to defend marriage as the lawful union of one man and one woman to the exclusion of all others.

* * *

QUESTIONS ON THE ORDER PAPER

Mr. Tom Lukiwski (Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I ask that all questions be allowed to stand.

The Speaker: Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[English]

FEDERAL ACCOUNTABILITY ACT

The House resumed from November 20 consideration of the motion, and of the amendment and of the amendment to the amendment.

The Speaker: When the debate on this matter was last before the House, the hon. member for Malpeque was in the midst of his remarks. He has five minutes remaining in the time allocated for his comments. I therefore call on the hon. member for Malpeque.

Hon. Wayne Easter (Malpeque, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to have the opportunity to complete my remarks on Bill C-2, the so-called accountability act. I have a couple of quotes that I was not quite finished with that I will get to in a moment.

It is ironic that the government by devious means, and that is the Prime Minister working with the leader of the separatist party, is attempting to disadvantage the Canadian Wheat Board, a prairie grain farmer marketing institution. In disadvantaging farmers in western Canada, the Prime Minister is really allowing the opportunity for the international grain trade, our competitors in the international market, to gain marketing advantage over Canadian farmers. It is ironic that we are talking about an accountability act and the Prime Minister is using these tactics.

It is devious because the move has nothing to do with accountability at all but, instead, shows that the Prime Minister will go to almost any length to get his way in his ideological drive to undermine the Canadian Wheat Board. This is not just a Canadian Wheat Board issue. This is about the Prime Minister's tactics, his willingness to cut a deal with the leader of the separatist party, and his ideological obsession with trying to destroy the Canadian Wheat Board, a board now controlled by farmers themselves.

Let us look for a moment at this access to information and how it will disadvantage the Canadian Wheat Board. I turn to a letter that the chair of the Canadian Wheat Board tabled with the Senate Standing Committee on Legal and Constitutional Affairs. It stated:

Therefore, the true beneficiaries of adding the CWB to ATIA will primarily be non-farmers such as competitors and foreign antagonists that would be able to make information requests.

Subjecting the CWB to ATIA will put it at a disadvantage to its commercial competitors. These competitors could gain access to types of information about the CWB that the CWB could not obtain from them. It would also open up sensitive information to access by its international antagonists (primarily, the United States). By way of example, since the implementation of the Canada-U.S. Trade Agreement the CWB has been subject to no fewer than 14 U.S.-led trade challenges or investigations. All of these actions have been groundless as the CWB has not once been found to be acting outside of its international trade obligations. Yet, through the CWB, western Canadian farmers have been forced to spend in excess of \$15 million to defend itself against these actions. The use of access to information requests by foreign parties is certain to become another vehicle to harass western Canadian farmers.

That is in fact what will happen. The Wheat Board will end up having to pay the costs for nuisance requests from people who are opposed to the board and farmers will have to bear those costs in western Canada. The Canadian Wheat Board again is being disadvantaged.

Government Orders

The parliamentary secretary is one of the key people trying to get the Canadian Wheat Board under access to information and he knows full well that the government never put forward the amendment. Why? It is because its legal advice said, as the Canadian Wheat Board Act states, that the Canadian Wheat Board is not a crown corporation or a government entity. Yes, it guarantees loans, but so does the government in other circles. That is important but it is not reason enough to have the Canadian Wheat Board under access to information.

• (1010)

The bottom line, which the government knows full well, is that the government had legal advice stating that the board should not be under these rules. The Canadian Wheat Board will be in the unique position of being the only non-government entity that has to abide by access to information rules and the people who will be disadvantaged are the grain farmers of western Canada. The people who will be advantaged are the international grain trade competitors that we compete against, mainly stationed in the United States.

What is happening here with the Bloc proposing the amendment to bring in access to information clearly shows that the Prime Minister is willing to cut a deal with almost anyone, even separatists, to get his way and disadvantage prairie farmers in the process.

• (1015)

Hon. Jay Hill: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. There has been some consultation now among all parties and I ask that you seek the consent of the House to return to routine proceedings and the introduction of government bills.

The Deputy Speaker: Does the hon. government whip have unanimous consent to return to routine proceedings?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

[English]

CRIMINAL CODE

Hon. Vic Toews (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, CPC) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-32, An Act to amend the Criminal Code (impaired driving) and to make consequential amendments to other Acts.

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

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[English]

FEDERAL ACCOUNTABILITY ACT

The House resumed consideration of the motion, and of the amendment and of the amendment to the amendment.

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I listened with interest to my colleague's speech about the threat posed to the Wheat Board. Like him, I recognize that the government and that party have done shameless things in the past to interfere

with the work of the Wheat Board, but I would like to ask the member a question.

If we manage to get the Wheat Board exempted from access to information, will the member's party support this accountability act to ensure that corruption is not endemic to Ottawa and to ensure that there is some kind of accountability? Would he work with the rest of the House to ensure that the unelected senators, many of whom flipped pancakes for the Liberal Party for 30 years as their ticket to the good life, will not further interfere with our attempts to bring accountability to the House?

Hon. Wayne Easter: Mr. Speaker, I would be pleased to answer that question. Although I doubt the tactics of the government to undermine the authority of and to disadvantage the Canadian Wheat Board, members of our party are very much strongly in favour of accountability. I know that the member opposite likes to attack the Senate from time to time, but thank goodness that the Senate did have some sober second thought in terms of many of the issues in this bill.

Yes, the senators proposed amendments. I would submit that most of the amendments they proposed are in fact good ones. I think we would find that most of us in the House are in favour of accountability, but we want to do it in a sensible way. The difficulty is that the government made this one of its priorities. The bill was hastily prepared and poorly worded. The government tried to leave the impression that the new government, as it calls itself, is in favour of accountability.

Let us look at some of its patronage appointments. It is not very accountable in that regard. Let us look at some of the things the Minister of Justice is trying to do in terms of judges. The government is not very accountable in that regard. It is all smoke and mirrors on the government side.

We will analyze the bill from our side of the House. We will debate it and we will vote accordingly. At the end of the day, what the official opposition wants to see is a good piece of legislation that makes sense to Canadians and holds the federal bureaucracy and the Government of Canada to account.

Mr. John Williams (Edmonton—St. Albert, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I noted that the member from Prince Edward Island is also a farmer in Prince Edward Island. He is so adamant and vociferous in his support of the Canadian Wheat Board, which applies only to prairie farmers, not to P.E.I. farmers, and he is absolutely insistent that this Wheat Board monopoly remain in place although it of course does not apply to him.

I was just wondering if the member, who is a farmer from Prince Edward Island, would be willing to apply to potatoes in Prince Edward Island the same standards that apply to the Wheat Board. Maybe they should be sold to a single outlet. Why is the member so insistent in imposing his points of view on prairie farmers if he is not prepared to accept the same position for his own farmers and his own business?

Government Orders

• (1020)

Hon. Wayne Easter: Yes indeed, Mr. Speaker, I am from Prince Edward Island and I am very proud of it, but my history is that I spent 10 years as president of the National Farmers Union, which has its head office in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan. There are hardly any communities in Saskatchewan, Alberta and the Peace River country that I have not been in, talking to farmers. I know on the ground in western Canada how those producers support the Canadian Wheat Board. The government opposite will not allow those producers a fair vote and a fair question to let farmers decide.

An hon. member: What about the potato board?

Hon. Wayne Easter: The member asks, what about the potato board? I ask members to look at my history. In terms of my time, we proposed a national beef commission for Canada, and the government of the day would not exercise a vote on it. I believe Prime Minister Trudeau was the prime minister at the time. We proposed, and in fact have had in place for some time in Prince Edward Island, a Canadian potato commission, which farmers voted on. That is their right.

The difference between the party on this side and that party is that we believe in the democratic rights of farmers. The party opposite believes in dictatorial positions taken by the Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food and Minister for the Canadian Wheat Board and the Prime Minister, and it will not allow western farmers their say on a clear question.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Jean-Yves Laforest (Saint-Maurice—Champlain, BQ): Mr. Speaker, in his remarks yesterday and today, the member for Malpeque brought back the issue of the amendment to an amendment put forward by the Bloc Québécois in connection with the Access to Information Act. This amendment to an amendment would put the Canadian Wheat Board under this act.

He contends that this would weaken the Canadian Wheat Board because of nuisance requests, among other things. We know that the Access to Information Act gives the general public access to information and allows it receive quite directly all information pertaining to the management of public funds.

How could one imagine or believe that nuisance requests being submitted to the Canadian Wheat Board under the Access to Information Act might weaken any government agency or department?

We know that nuisance requests are made under the Access to Information Act on a daily basis. That is no reason to exempt such agencies and departments from the application of the Access to Information Act. I am not following that logic at all. Besides, that was pretty much his only argument.

[*English*]

Hon. Wayne Easter: Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the hon. member's question, because I sincerely believe that in the Bloc amendment, the Bloc is really doing for the government what the government would not do for itself in terms of being clear-cut and putting forward the amendment to put the Canadian Wheat Board under access to information.

The reason the government has not done so is that its own advice was that it would affect the Canadian Wheat Board negatively and the government could not find a way to be absolutely sure that commercial confidentiality was protected.

Let us keep in mind the kinds of companies that the Wheat Board is up against in terms of the marketing of grain. It is up against Archer-Daniels-Midland, Cargill, Louis Dreyfus and Bunge, the big grain companies of the world. They want to take over the Canadian grain industry and disadvantage Canadian farmers. The Canadian Wheat Board is in fact there to protect Canadian farmers.

The fact of the matter is that yes, there are going to be nuisance requests for access to information, and that will put the Canadian Wheat Board at a disadvantage.

The member's indication was about government money as well. I listened to the remarks from the Bloc Québécois yesterday. The Canadian Wheat Board uses producers' money, not government money. Yes, there are government guarantees, and there have been times in the past that the government has had to come in with that guarantee, but it is farmers' money that is at stake here, the primary producers' money.

This will be the only non-government entity in Canada that falls under access to information. The Bloc member should know as well that there are several single desk selling institutions in the province of Quebec. Should the same principles be applied to them in terms of those single desk selling institutions in Quebec? Should they be under access to information? I think not.

• (1025)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Michel Guimond (Montmorency—Charlevoix—Haute-Côte-Nord, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to address Bill C-2, Federal Accountability Act.

First, I would like to take a moment to remember one of our colleagues who worked very hard in committee on this legislation, this past spring. He did serious work and he spent many hours on this issue. Of course, I am referring to my former colleague Benoît Sauvageau, the member for Repentigny, who sat on the committee and was in charge of this issue for the Bloc Québécois. I am convinced that, wherever he may be, he is listening to us right now. I feel it is my duty to properly present the positions that he defended in committee and that accurately reflect those of the Bloc Québécois on this issue.

I should reiterate the fact that the Bloc Québécois supports Bill C-2. However, I clearly remember the work done by the legislative committee that reviewed Bill C-2. The Bloc Québécois continues to deplore the fact that it would have been in our best interests to hear many more witnesses and to do serious work in committee. This does not necessarily mean that we wanted to unduly extend debates by resorting to systematic filibustering or some other means.

Government Orders

However, we deplored, particularly during the clause by clause review of the bill and also when the list of witnesses was made, the government's attempt to ram through this legislation. The NDP worked as an accomplice to that end. I am using the term "accomplice" because I am not allowed to use a stronger word. The member for Winnipeg Centre literally got into bed with the government regarding this issue. He was an accomplice of the government to help it pass this legislation quickly. Had it not been for that complicity, we would have had time to hold a debate and to have much more extensive discussions on this bill.

Why does the Bloc Québécois support this measure? Because it will increase government accountability and transparency. I will list some points, since this is a major piece of legislation not only in terms of the number of clauses in it, but also the number of acts targeted. I talked about this at other stages of the bill and, as I recall, it affects 21 different acts. So, it is indeed a major piece of legislation.

As we know, Bill C-2 entrenches in law a ministerial code of ethics. It puts an end to the favouritism that allowed ministerial staff to enter the public service with priority status over qualified public servants. It strengthens the powers of the Auditor General and the Ethics Commissioner. It creates a stricter operating framework for lobbyists and reduces the influence of money during election campaigns, leadership campaigns and nomination meetings. It also creates the position of director of public prosecutions, which strengthens the independence of the justice system.

We also supported Bill C-2 because it meets some of what I would call traditional Bloc Québécois demands. The Bloc Québécois has been making these demands since it was founded, and even since the arrival of the first parliamentarians who agreed to sit under the Bloc Québécois banner. As we all know, from 1990 to 1993, they were not a recognized party in Parliament and had to sit as independents.

● (1030)

Nevertheless, in the years since the first Bloc Québécois members of Parliament took their seats as sovereignist members—let us not forget—we have repeatedly—especially from 1993 to 1997, when we were the official opposition—asked for one thing in particular: that Elections Canada appoint its returning officers based on merit.

I see that the President of the Treasury Board is applauding. I would just like to tell him, through you, Mr. Speaker, how pleased I am to see that, in this bill, he has agreed to one of the Bloc Québécois' traditional demands aimed at depoliticizing the appointment of returning officers. After every election, we have all had our stories, our little black books, our horror stories, perhaps, about decisions made by incompetent returning officers in every one of our ridings. Such incompetence does not just harm one particular party, political organization or electoral organization. An incompetent returning officer has a negative impact on everyone, including all of the candidates.

I could speak on this point alone, and I have done so in the past. We have only to think of the returning officer who agrees to have someone who can neither read nor write serve as a polling clerk or some of the unsuitable polling stations. In my riding, in Saint-Laurent-de-l'Île d'Orléans, I once took Jean-Pierre Kingsley, Canada's Chief Electoral Officer, to see a hockey players' dressing

room during the June 2004 election so that he could understand the problem there. In an arena in a municipality the size of Saint-Laurent-de-l'Île d'Orléans, the players' dressing room is not as large as the Canadiens' dressing room at the Bell Centre or the Maple Leafs' dressing room in Toronto. It is a very tight space where there were six polling divisions and where, from beside the polling booths, you could literally see who someone was voting for. I could tell many more horror stories like that one, but members might wonder what my point was. I will therefore simply congratulate the government on granting the request from the Bloc Québécois to use an open, transparent competition, where the best qualified person is appointed as the returning officer, from now on. This will put an end to political appointments where a good Conservative or Liberal organizer was appointed to the position.

In response to another traditional request from the Bloc Québécois, Bill C-2 will amend the political party financing legislation, which will now be much more like the legislation in Quebec. I forgot to mention a minute ago that appointing returning officers using an open, transparent process where the position is posted in the newspapers is exactly the system Quebec has had since 1977, I believe. This system works very well in Quebec, I would add. The bill before us was inspired by the political party financing legislation in Quebec, which is part of the political heritage of René Lévesque, who cleaned up election practices and election financing practices in Quebec. This is another interesting aspect of Bill C-2, which prohibits corporate donations and caps individual donations at a more reasonable level.

● (1035)

We know that the Senate has engaged in its own analysis of Bill C-2. Of course, in the Bloc Québécois, we have our own ideas about what purpose the Senate serves and we would support abolishing it outright. It is a totally pointless organization that exists only for the plum appointments that can be handed out. Whoever is in power appoints senators of his own persuasion. We should abolish the Senate outright.

However, we have to acknowledge that the two solitudes in Canada mean that we have not reached that point yet. While a majority of Quebecers support abolishing the Senate, people in other provinces want a stronger Senate. That is probably the case for your fellow Manitobans, in your province of origin, Mr. Speaker. As a result, there can be no consensus on this question.

When I meet people on weekends, I tell them about what the Senate costs, and when we talk about how pointless it is, I also tell them that for us, the people of Quebec, the only way to get rid of the Senate is through sovereignty for Quebec. We will have nothing more to do with the Senate of Canada, just as we will have nothing more to do with the Governor General or the lieutenant governors of each of the provinces.

Government Orders

However, in the present system, the Senate has done its own analysis of Bill C-2 and has proposed the amendments that are now before us. We have to say that some of those amendments may be worth considering, but others are totally unacceptable. We have done a careful, serious and thorough analysis of the government's position on the Senate amendments. As a result, I can add that the Bloc Québécois supports the government's rejection of several of the Senate amendments, which in our opinion do not advance either ethics or transparency.

You know that a majority of the Senate is made up of Liberal Party members. The Liberals were in power for so long in the 20th century that they had time to literally pack the joint, as it were. So they are superior, in numbers, to the Conservative senators. Probably as a result of the majority being Liberal, the senators come back to us and tell us that they would like to keep their own Senate adviser. This is another anomaly of a two-chamber system. The Senate is apparently jealously guarding its constitutional prerogatives and does not want to share the same ethics adviser. It is suggesting an amendment to us: a puppet adviser who would be under the authority of a Senate committee, and who would in fact be about as effective as Howard Wilson, Prime Minister Chrétien's ethics adviser, was.

Mr. Wilson has appeared as a witness at the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs. He is a nice young man. We have nothing against him personally, but Howard Wilson was a political adviser to Jean Chrétien rather than a real ethics adviser. In this regard, we agree with the government, which is getting ready to reject this amendment tabled by the Senate.

I would like to talk about a number of other amendments put forward by the Senate. Unfortunately, since there is not enough time, I cannot do that, but my colleagues probably have some comments to make about them.

The Bloc Québécois has always maintained that strengthening legislation and policies is ineffective if there is no real will by government members to change things. Justice Gomery said in his 23 recommendations that it is all well and good to have more effective control systems, but that the culture of entitlement needs to change in Ottawa. This was the culture that existed at the time in the Liberal Party. Having been in power for a long time, the Liberal Party practically thought it was the state incarnate. The Liberals were in charge of the public purse and could pretty much do what they wanted with it.

•(1040)

That is what happened during the sponsorship scandal. Justice Gomery told us that regardless of whether we have the most effective control mechanisms—and I am directing this to the Conservative Party—we have to change the culture here in Ottawa. The Bloc Québécois decided to give them a chance, but a number of signs, in how the Conservatives manage, concern us. We also know that as far as lobbying is concerned, the current Prime Minister tolerates what he was criticizing the Liberals for at the time. That is why the Bloc Québécois is saying that the Liberals and the Conservatives are six of one and half a dozen of the other. They are the same whether they are in opposition or in power.

On the other hand, the members of the Bloc Québécois have real power to ensure that people act responsibly. Do not forget that as

elected members we are in charge of taxpayers' money above all and not our own money. We have to be accountable to our constituents. Taxpayers no longer feel like paying and they find they are paying a lot for the services they are getting.

We are aware of this at many levels of government management, be it municipal, school, provincial or federal. In mentioning school and municipal levels, far be it from me to claim that these local managers and elected representatives are not doing a good job. They do a great job. Still, those who pay school taxes and municipal taxes, in addition to federal and provincial income and other taxes are citizens and taxpayers. They are entitled to receive the services they pay for. This is why people are becoming increasingly critical. In the vast majority of cases, administrators at the school and municipal levels do an outstanding job with few resources, and all the needs and aging infrastructures.

Where we are critical of the current Prime Minister is that he allows into his immediate entourage certain people who may have links with lobbying or with firms which they have lobbied in the very recent past. I will give you some examples. The Minister of National Defence was a lobbyist with Hill & Knowlton from 1996 to February 2004. So, for nearly ten years, his clients included such companies as BAE Systems, General Dynamics, United Defense, Irvin Aerospace, Airbus and Bennett Environmental.

The Minister of National Defence manages a portfolio of extraordinary investments and we note that the Conservatives do not have any problems finding money for defence. During the months of May and June, they purchased military equipment worth \$15 billion. In a month and a half, they went out and bought tanks, boats in Halifax, and vehicles and trucks at Valcartier. They also went to Toronto and the west. In all, they bought close to \$15 billion worth of military equipment. When the time comes, though, to find money for support and protection programs for women, the disadvantaged, the homeless or for SCPI, they cannot come up with any money.

•(1045)

Mr. Speaker, you are letting me know that my time is up. I could have gone on speaking much longer. I am almost tempted to ask you for unanimous consent so that I can continue my speech until question period, but I am going to sit down.

[*English*]

Mr. Pierre Poilievre (Parliamentary Secretary to the President of the Treasury Board, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Bloc member mentioned the goal of expanding access to information and transparency in government and that his party supports the right of farmers to have access to information on the monopoly that controls all sales and marketing of western grain, wheat and barley.

Government Orders

Earlier on, when the member for Malpeque said that this was somehow unusual, he did not mention that virtually every crown corporation in this country will be covered by access to information after the passage of the accountability act. For example, Canada Post will be covered by access to information, as will numerous other corporations that must compete internationally. CBC, VIA Rail and BDC, which is a bank for small businesses, all these organizations will be covered by access to information, which means that they will need to compete internationally and across this country with access to information.

There is no reason why the Wheat Board cannot do the same thing. It is a federally mandated wheat monopoly. If it is controlled by farmers, then farmers ought to have the right to know what is going on in that organization.

What is the member for Malpeque hiding? What is he worried might be unearthed if farmers are given the right to file access to information requests?

There are organizations across the country that are subject to access to information. Just because we are adding CBC and Canada Post to access to information does not mean we are attacking them. It is a method of accountability and openness that is being spread right across this government as a result of the accountability act.

If the Liberal Party wants to oppose it, why will it not tell us exactly what it is that it is trying to hide from Canadian farmers?

The Deputy Speaker: The hon. member appears to be asking a question of someone who is not here.

The hon. member for Montmorency—Charlevoix—Haute-Côte-Nord.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Michel Guimond: Mr. Speaker, that is precisely what I was going to say. It is not very hygienic, but you took the words right out of my mouth. I will let it go, this time. I am joking, of course.

Instead of speaking with the President of the Treasury Board, my hon. colleague from Nepean—Carleton might have been better off listening to my speech.

In my speech, I did not have enough time to mention supply management, not even once. I did not mention farmers even once. Yet, his question was directed to the Liberal member for Malpeque. Since this is an all-out attack against the Liberal Party, I have no desire to waste my energy answering a question that has nothing to do with my speech.

•(1050)

Ms. Denise Savoie (Victoria, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague for his comments and for pointing out some of the very positive aspects of this bill, particularly those concerning returning officers and electoral financing.

I do have a concern, however, that worries me. A Conservative government often tends to want to limit the government's ability to act in the public interest and acts instead for the benefit of large corporations in the private sector.

Does my colleague believe that this bill could have such an effect, for example, subjecting the Canadian Wheat Board to access to

information under the pretext of eliminating a monopoly? This could weaken the commission and farmers' ability to defend themselves against companies such as Cargill, by simply opening their books to those companies.

Mr. Michel Guimond: Mr. Speaker, my hon. colleague from Victoria raises a very important point indeed. Furthermore, the many faxes I receive in my office, from all ridings and particularly from western Canada, indicate that people are very worried about the future of the Canadian Wheat Board. I think my colleague has raised some very pertinent questions.

Hon. John Baird (President of the Treasury Board, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague from Quebec for giving a good speech.

I too am very unhappy with the current provisions of the act dealing with the appointment of those in charge of elections in the 308 ridings. The Bloc has been talking about such practice for a long time. Our caucus also talked about it: the member for Lanark—Frontenac—Lennox and Addington has been doing so for a long time.

Benoît Sauvageau, the former member for Repentigny, also brought it up. In fact, I remember Mr. Sauvageau once questioning me on that, asking whether we would do the right thing and include this provision in the bill. I told him we would. Following oral question period that day, he came to me and said that, in his 13 years in the House as an MP, that was the first time that a minister had given him a real answer, which I found very funny.

For the first time, the government will be cancelling 308 political appointments, patronage appointments if you will, and do things over properly. I am very pleased that the member raised this good aspect of Bill C-2.

The members on this side of the House agree with him and the Bloc on this very important issue.

Mr. Michel Guimond: Mr. Speaker, I would like to clarify one thing for the people listening to us, both those who come and listen to the House debates in the gallery and those who watch on television. When we have a parliamentary recess—like last week—we are not on vacation, contrary to what some journalists seem to think. We are on a parliamentary recess. I know that all my hon. colleagues in the House were out working very hard in their ridings, visiting with their electors and attending various events.

People sometimes accuse us of indulging in crass partisanship: because the government introduces a bill, the opposition has to be against it. I appreciate the comments of my hon. colleague, the President of Treasury Board. My comments and the position taken by the Bloc Québécois are in this spirit.

Although it was the Conservative government that introduced this bill, the Bloc members evaluated it and believe that it is very good in some ways. That is why we were in favour of it.

Government Orders

I did find fault with one thing, though, namely that with the complicity of the hon. member for Winnipeg Centre, the government put the pedal to the metal and proceeded very fast. That was my impression. In general, though, I must say that one of our traditional demands has been the de-politicization of returning officer appointments. In a way, returning officers are the guardians of democracy. Local returning officers assigned to a riding are responsible for the democratic conduct of the election so that the people's representatives are chosen democratically. That is the ultimate goal. Although I am very happy with this, I would not go so far as to go and plant a kiss on the Treasury Board president, even though this is a fine step forward.

In regard to some other matters, however, the government would be well advised to try to be more transparent. For instance, there is the matter of the severance payment given to David Dingwall when he left the Royal Canadian Mint. The Conservatives are refusing to make arbitrator Adam's report on this payment public. We have been pressuring the Prime Minister to promise to make it public, and he actually did on April 5, 2005.

Since my former colleague, Benoît Sauvageau, went to see the Treasury Board president to tell him how pleased he was finally to get a real answer for the first time, I would like the Treasury Board president to rise in the House one day and announce that he is making arbitrator Adams' report on David Dingwall's severance payment public.

• (1055)

Mr. Jean-Yves Laforest (Saint-Maurice—Champlain, BQ): Mr. Speaker, my colleague said earlier that Bill C-2 amended in part some 20 pieces of legislation, including the Access to Information Act. But at the same time—and a number of members have mentioned this during this debate—this bill does not go far enough in reforming the Access to Information Act. Hon. members will recall that the Conservative Party promised during the last election campaign to accept the recommendations of the Information Commissioner, who was proposing a series of measures.

I would like to ask my colleague how he thinks such a change could have been made and how it could have benefited the Access to Information Act.

Mr. Michel Guimond (Montmorency—Charlevoix—Haute-Côte-Nord, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I will answer quickly.

I said earlier that, on the whole, we agree with this bill. But there are still some areas where the government should go further. The Prime Minister is being criticized for wanting to prove that he cleans whiter than white. He wants to be seen as Mr. Clean. He wants to be the Mr. Clean of Canadian politics. Unfortunately, he sometimes hides things from us. That is what this Conservative government is being criticized for. What is more, we in the Bloc Québécois believe that, instead of being more transparent, the Conservatives are continuing to be secretive, for example, by postponing the adoption of the Access to Information Act.

[English]

Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to participate in the debate on Bill C-2, the federal accountability act.

First, I do not think there is any member in this place who does not share a common objective, which I believe the President of the Treasury Board said in his opening speech on April 25 of this year at the lead speech on second reading. He said, "Our goal, our commitment, simply put, is to make government more accountable".

On this basis, I believe Bill C-2 had that goal as its fundamental principle and, as such, it received the unanimous support of all parties at second reading and through the rest of the process. I am sure all hon. members will support the bill.

However, members will know that there have been a lot of discussions over a great period of time about how the bill was done. There were concerns when the bill was first tabled. The government put forward a very significant document. I do not believe there is any other bill, which I have had to work on as a parliamentarian, that touches so many other acts. It is an omnibus bill.

The bill touches a very large number of acts and it is difficult to read. We cannot start at the beginning, go through and see the story, the lead up, the plot, the end of it and everybody lives happily ever after. It is not like that. Every section of it refers to amending some other piece of existing legislation. There are also some transitional positions, et cetera, but in the main we are basically amending a very large number of other legislation.

When we looked at Bill C-2, we had something over 200 pages. Then we were told at the outset that the government wanted it passed. I believe April 25 was the first debate, and it wanted it passed by the summer.

It begs the question about how parliamentarians discharge their responsibilities. In the prayer we start the House with every day we say that we make good laws and wise decisions. It is not possible to have done this bill justice in such a short time and yet it was at the government's insistence that we push this matter because it wanted the bill passed by the summer. It is now November.

There have been a lot of questions about whether someone has been delaying the process, whether it be in the House or in the Senate. Parliamentarians not only have the right but they have the duty to do the job as they see fit, to make good laws and wise decisions. I do not think any member of Parliament, except those possibly who were on the special legislative committee to deal with Bill C-2, had the opportunity and the time to get into the detail. However, we all had an opportunity to look at aspects of the bill in which we may have had some background.

Canadians should understand, when parliamentarians rise to vote on Bill C-2 tonight on the subamendment, on the amendment, on the concurrence and on the passage of the bill to be sent back to the Senate, that members of Parliament have had to rely on many other people in this chamber who have done the work in a great bit of detail.

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I wanted to make that point because we have, with a very large bill, a situation where members of Parliament have been asked to rely on the work of others in order for them to make an informed decision. It is very difficult, and I have some reservation about some of the areas of the bill. However, because there was an alliance formed by the government and another party, the amount of time that was available for the debate and to consider amendments, even at report stage, was truncated substantially. There was a forced position. In fact, we did not even have a final vote before it went to the Senate. Basically, we deemed that the question was put and deemed that it was passed. There was no recorded division on it.

● (1100)

It suggests to me, and I am sure it suggests to those observers who watch the legislative process, that when a bill is put together in such haste, there will be mistakes. I do not think anyone in this place will deny the fact that there were mistakes made in the bill that Parliament passed and referred to the Senate.

In fact, the President of the Treasury Board, in dealing with the work of the Senate, estimated that there were about 154 amendments proposed by senators. The Senate is composed of Liberal and Conservative senators, and 42 of those amendments came from Conservative senators. Of the 150-some odd amendments, the President of the Treasury Board accepted, without debate, without further consideration, 57 amendments.

The fact is the President of the Treasury Board, who is the minister responsible for Bill C-2, accepted some 57 amendments proposed by the Senate to make this a better bill. For that to happen, I think the Senate demonstrated that it did the job it was put there to do.

The Senate reviewed the legislation. It came up with changes, and we are still considering other amendments. The President of the Treasury Board has laid out, and the members can see, some of the brief reasons why some of the other proposed amendments are not acceptable to the government. That is his job. I believe this debate will find there are still a couple of items that yet remain unresolved.

In the main, I think all members of Parliament understand that Bill C-2 will pass the House and go back to the Senate. I want to advise members that the Senate has already made some consideration as to what happens when it goes back to the Senate. It has decided to have the bill immediately referred back to its legislative committee to advise the Senate on the appropriate course of action to take. The Senate is ready and waiting for this bill.

I am hopeful we will see Bill C-2 pass at all stages, get it through the Senate and receive royal assent prior to the House rising. The proclamation of the bill is up to the government.

I want to make one explanation. Even though a bill passes through the House of Commons and the Senate and receives royal assent, it is not in force. It is law but it is not in force until it is proclaimed. I raise that because we have the same issue with regard to another bill, Bill C-11, the whistleblower legislation, which passed and received royal assent in the last Parliament, and I will comment on that bill.

Bill C-2 is about accountability. I think we know that we have the support of all hon. members in the House to make the bill as good as possible, to ensure that it passes and that we get some of the

important provisions started. Much of the legislation will require a lot of changes within the public service of Canada, within the administration of political parties and within all these acts. The Chief Electoral Officer will have quite a job to do.

A week ago Friday, I was pleased to participate as a panellist at a special conference in Ottawa on the subject matter of accountability, with specific reference to Bill C-2. It was a four day conference and I followed some of it. I found out that many of the panellists and presenters were law scholars, professors from universities and experts on various aspects of law such as access to information. Members of Parliament and senators participated as well.

● (1105)

I found it fascinating that a debate was going on as to what we meant by accountability. It was interesting how different speakers had different definitions for accountability. Having recognized that, I went to the dictionary to find out what a lay dictionary would say about someone who is accountable. If we look up the word “accountable”, accountability is a form of usage. It basically said that accountability has to do with someone who is required to explain or justify his or her actions or decisions. That was the short definition of “accountable”.

As a chartered accountant, I worked a lot on public financing. There is a document called a prospectus which goes out to potential investors to give them all the information they need to make an informed decision about whether they want to invest in an offering. One of the principles in terms of requirements of a prospectus, which is very important, is that it give true, full and plain disclosure.

With that as background, I spoke at this conference and defined, for our purposes, accountability as a government or as anyone explaining and/or justifying their actions or decisions with true, full and plain disclosure. We can see all of a sudden that the definition is building because someone can be accountable to different degrees. We can be accountable by giving some part of a true, full and plain disclosure but the degree to which one is accountable comes into question.

I went on that theme but also wanted to look at some examples. A very simple example was in the throne speech that the government presented at the beginning of this Parliament. The Minister of Finance announced that there would be a decrease in taxes to 15.5% on the first marginal tax rate. In fact, the tax rate actually went up. It had been reduced in the last Parliament to 15% and the throne speech increased the tax rate on the first marginal bracket to 15.5%. It was an increase in taxes for Canadians.

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The finance minister subsequently explained that the change in the tax rate by the previous government from 16% down to 15% was only in a ways and means motion that had not yet passed in the House. Mr. Speaker, you will know that when a finance minister announces changes, like what was done with the income trust, those things are all of a sudden in effect. Subsequently, as Parliament gets a chance to review and vote on the ways and means motion, it will formally ratify it but, if it should be defeated, we cannot go back retroactively. Therefore, the rate that was announced by the previous government was 15% and the tax returns of Canadians for the 2005 tax year showed an initial tax rate of 15%.

Had Parliament continued and not been interrupted by an election, the ways and means motion would have been voted on. Had it been defeated, the tax rate would have reverted to 16% but only from the date of the vote in Parliament that defeated the ways and means motion.

The finance minister said that since it did not pass in Parliament, as far as he was concerned the rate was still 16% and he reduced it to 15.5%. It is wordsmithing. It is semantics. There is no question that Canadians paid a tax rate of 15% on their 2005 return but the government in its throne speech and in the budget that was passed increased that tax rate to 15.5%.

• (1110)

Now we need to ask whether the government was accountable. Was it accountable to Canadians? The Conservatives said that they had decreased taxes but they in fact increased the taxes. When we go through that explanation, we do not get the chance to explain it to everyone and I am not sure everyone would understand. I am not even sure anyone will understand what I just said.

However, we need to apply the definition of accountability, which is explaining or justifying our actions or decisions in true full and plain disclosure, but this was not done. On that item the government was not fully accountable. It was sort of accountable but with an explanation or a qualification. It was not pure and true accountability.

With regard to income trusts, the government made a promise during the election campaign. At that point, the Conservative Party, wanting to form a government, was not accountable. Do members know why? It was because the making of a promise not to raise taxes on income trusts was interfering in the marketplace and any finance minister knows that the predictability and stability of the marketplace is the responsibility of a finance minister not to impact the marketplace unduly, not to jaundice or bias it so that there is no government interference in the financial markets.

The first decision to make that promise was to give some assurances, which would have affected the decision of investors. When they saw that as part of the Conservatives' platform, they decided that if those people were elected they would make that happen. If we look at the numbers on income trusts, more Canadians buy into income trusts because it offers a substantial opportunity for high return and a regular cashflow, which many seniors like because it allows them to emulate a pension plan.

The first promise not to tax income trusts was unaccountable but the second one was the broken promise, the so-called double-cross,

which was to all of a sudden tax income trusts. The ethical question comes up about whether a government is responsible for keeping its promises or, if it must break its promises, to at least explain and justify them in true, full and plain disclosure. However, that did not happen. In fact, the implications to the marketplace were clear. It was the mother of all free falls in the financial markets. Thirty-five billion dollars of the wealth of Canadians was wiped out in a day and half.

The government made two mistakes. The first one was interfering in the marketplace by making such a promise. The second one was breaking the promise, notwithstanding that there was some argument that the problem had to be dealt with. Even today the Canadian Association of Income Funds is providing analyses that refute the fact that there is a significant disparity between the tax treatment of income trusts and of dividend paying corporations.

On the question of accountability, it would have been a greater degree of accountability had the announcement of that decision been taken, say, on a Friday. At least the people who would be impacted would have had the opportunity to do something before the opening of the market on Monday. Instead, the government made the announcement mid-week and Canadians did not have an opportunity to consider the change and many people lost money. Was there accountability there? I would say not.

• (1115)

I wish I had more time to talk to hon. members about some of the aspects of the bill. I have problems with some areas. I wish the access to information provisions were stronger, as recommended by the former commissioner, Mr. Reid. There are some other matters that I believe we can deal with at a future time, so that is not critical.

On the whole, we are moving in the right direction and I congratulate all hon. members for doing as good a job as possible in the time allotted.

• (1120)

Hon. John Baird: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. There have been discussions among all four parties and I believe you would find unanimous consent for me to put the following motion about a small French language translation issue.

The Deputy Speaker: Does the hon. President of the Treasury Board have the unanimous consent of the House to move the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

[*Translation*]

Hon. John Baird (President of the Treasury Board, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I move:

That:

The amendment to clause 98, in the French version, be replaced with the following amendment:

Article 108, page 94: Remplacer les lignes 1 à 2 par ce qui suit:

(4) Les articles 41 à 43, le paragraphe 44(3) et (4) et les articles 45 à 55, 57 et 60 à 64 entrent en vigueur ou sont réputés être entrés en vigueur le 1^{er} janvier 2007.

(4.1) Les articles 73 à 74 entrent en vigueur ou sont réputés être entrés en vigueur le 1^{er} janvier 2007, mais ils

[*English*]

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

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Some hon. members: Agreed.

(Motion agreed to)

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to respond to my hon. colleague. I do not know if I would call this a discourse. I might actually call it an anti-discourse. In the normal form of ordered debate, after 20 minutes one should actually get a sense of where the member is going.

I would say that it was almost brilliant in the way he laid out the initial issue, which is the need for accountability. By accountability, we could use the word transparency, transparency like a pool. We could look through that pool to see the problem.

The problem for the people of Canada was making the recalcitrant Liberal Party accountable so it would stop stealing people's money. We had this job before us in Parliament and this was the order of the bill. It started out that we were looking at the pool and it was a very transparent pool. Everyone agreed on the need to do this work.

The member began with a vague movement through the waters. We tried to follow the rational course of logic of where he was going until the sheer turbidity of word volume left it so vague and cloudy that we actually lost sight of the original problem of accountability, which was to make his party accountable to the people of Canada, and why we had this bill brought in.

What struck me, after hearing the hon. member's speech, was that he seemed to be very concerned that we were rushing the party into accountability, that by the end of this session we would actually deliver the goods to the people of Canada and that we should have more reflection. He talked about how the governing party had to work with other parties to force this disobedient party to actually get the bill through.

If he is so concerned about that, I would like to ask him about another bill, the softwood lumber bill. On the softwood lumber bill we had asked for national hearings because the passage of the softwood lumber bill will affect every forest community in the country. It was the Liberal Party, in collusion with the government party, that ensured there would be no hearings. It was the Liberal Party at committee that worked to ensure that debate on the major amendments that would affect the softwood lumber industry were limited to 60 seconds in its haste to get this off the political agenda.

I guess I am flabbergasted that the member is upset that we are actually trying to get something done with this accountability bill, a bill for which we have waited many years. His own party has put such brutal restrictions on the ability of members of Parliament to review legislation on softwood lumber that they will have profound implications for the future of our forest dependent industries.

• (1125)

Mr. Paul Szabo: Mr. Speaker, there are two things. First, I am not upset. Second, I know the member is flabbergasted.

I am sorry that the member did not hear all of my speech, but in the very first sentence I said that I supported the accountability act, and I have all along. Then I went into a complete description of the difficulty that an ordinary member of Parliament would have in dealing with this extensive bill. Let me give the member another example.

I have raised this point in the House a couple of times already. It has to do with Bill C-11, the whistleblower bill, which received royal assent in the last Parliament but was not proclaimed. I was going to get to that in my speech. It was not proclaimed so it is not enforceable.

There are amendments in Bill C-2 which would change the whistleblower bill, but the whistleblower bill would have to be proclaimed and then Bill C-2 would be proclaimed once it got through the rest of the process, so that in combination it is where the government would like to have it. I understand that.

I am not sure if that would even meet the member's requirement for accountability simply because the whistleblower bill is important. It creates an officer of Parliament. It creates protection for public servants who come forward and disclose alleged wrongdoing by the government or government departments.

That bill should have been proclaimed. If the government had problems with it, it should have had a separate bill to make amendments to it so that we could, even by now, have had it fully in place. We could have had the protection for public servants that they do not enjoy today. It has been a waste of time. I do not believe that even that action or inaction has been fully accountable by the government.

I raised a number of those examples, but I would be happy to speak with the member about any aspect of the bill, including another bill that he referred to on the softwood deal, which I opposed and opposed and opposed.

Mr. Pierre Lemieux (Glengarry—Prescott—Russell, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I listened to my Liberal colleague speak about the federal accountability act. One of his key points was that the bill somehow was moved on too quickly. He implied that we should have taken longer, that we should have taken our time and perhaps even dragged things on a bit.

I would state here that there is a sense of urgency among Canadians with respect to federal accountability. Long before the election, but also during the election, Canadians saw and tasted corruption and they did not like it. They witnessed the culture of entitlement that existed within the Liberal Party. David Dingwall put it so well when he expressed the viewpoint of the Liberal Party, "I am entitled to my entitlements". Canadians did not like that either. Canadians want change and they want it now.

When the Prime Minister finally announced the federal accountability act, Canadians cheered. Finally, there is a Prime Minister and a government that will restore accountability to government, that will bring an end to the culture of entitlement.

The point I want to make is that the House of Commons took roughly 70 days to pass that legislation. It was a priority for this House to move the legislation along. The Liberal dominated Senate took over 140 days to deal with this piece of legislation, twice as long. Canadians want accountability now, not in 2008.

How is it that my colleague justifies a Liberal dominated Senate taking over 140 days to deal with an issue that is so important to the government, to all MPs in the House and particularly to Canadians?

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Mr. Paul Szabo: Mr. Speaker, I do not think the member is being fully accountable about the time. It was not 70 days that the House spent on the bill. We did not deal with it every day. The member is counting calendar days and the House does not sit on Saturdays and Sundays and we have weeks off. The bill was first debated at second reading on April 25. We rose in the third week of June. There were not that many sitting days.

The hon. member's main point is that it has taken all this time. Had we been careful and given the due diligence we should have given to Bill C-2 in the House, at committee where there was a restriction as to witnesses, et cetera, at report stage and at third reading, there probably would not have been any amendments coming from the Senate. We would not have had any amendments, which means that the bill would have already been passed and in force today. The member has to understand that if we act with haste and force the Senate to do the job that we did not do, it will take longer.

Was the government accountable in terms of how it dealt with the bill? I think not.

• (1130)

Hon. John Baird (President of the Treasury Board, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I listened with great interest as I always do when my friend from Mississauga South rises to speak. I found one part of his intervention most interesting. He said he wished the access to information parts of Bill C-2, the federal accountability act, were stronger and went further. We are increasing by 30, I think, the number of agencies, organizations and corporations that are covered by the bill.

I have two questions for the member. Why would his party put forward an amendment to bring darkness where there is light at the Canadian Wheat Board? Why last November did every member of the Liberal Party vote against including a wide range of organizations and issues under access to information when Commissioner Reid came forward with his recommendation?

Mr. Paul Szabo: Mr. Speaker, with regard to the Wheat Board, this is a little more complicated than the minister has relayed to the House. The member for Malpeque laid out the case very well. I would urge the President of the Treasury Board to look at his commentary and his responses to some fairly tough but fair questions.

With regard to Commissioner Reid, I had the pleasure to join him at a conference where I was a speaker. We talked about the changes that were not there. In fact, his description of what was not there was basically an evisceration of the recommendations that he had made as the Information Commissioner. He held that position for some seven years. I know the gentleman through committee work, his experience and expertise and counsel that he has given to parliamentarians over the period he was here. I respect his opinion. In his view, and I agree with him, there were substantive changes or exclusions made from proposed amendments by him to the Access to Information Act. In that regard we have not taken the opportunity to enhance one of the most important tools we have to promote accountability in government.

I would remind the President of the Treasury Board that government is not just the elected political people, it is also the

people in those departments, in his own department, collectively, who represent the government. The accountability act unfortunately has the presumption of guilt or wrongdoing as opposed to the charter principle of the presumption of innocence. We may have unintended consequences with this bill.

The government has decided to go down this route. We are prepared to accept its decision to basically overlay an administrative burden and some very onerous tasks on the public service, which may in fact reduce productivity in the public service and which may do more harm than good.

I would have thought from my own perspective that the better approach to improving the accountability of government, being elected as well as unelected persons responsible for taxpayers' dollars, would be to look at the areas where there was significant risk or examples of where there were problems to be dealt with. It would be better to deal with those on a more focused or surgical basis rather than to overlay and have the presumption of guilt to all involved.

• (1135)

Ms. Peggy Nash (Parkdale—High Park, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to speak to this important Bill C-2 on accountability.

The issue of accountability gets to the heart of our democratic system. We live in a democratic country. We are proud of that. We encourage and support other democracies around the world. Surely a strong democratic system of operation is a hallmark of the best of society. It is something that we wish for all people around the world.

But democracies are imperfect, including our own. We often have political democracy without having economic democracy. We see that in many countries, including here in Canada. While there are many criticisms of democracy, the solution to the problems of democracy is not to shun democracy, not to become cynical or turn away from democracy, but in fact to have more democracy and to strengthen the democratic institutions that we all support and which we represent here in this House.

It distresses me greatly to speak with people in my community who say that they are disgusted with politicians. They are disgusted with the political process. They do not want to be involved with elections or even with voting. There is a cynicism that really undermines the democratic process.

In the last election the issue of ethics was, I believe, the dominant issue. Lack of ethics has bred into a sense of cynicism and a disregard for the democratic process. This is a fundamental erosion of our democracy which we must address. I believe it is the most basic and most important issue that confronts us as parliamentarians.

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It is easy to become lazy or complacent about the democratic process, but when we are lazy or complacent, surely that is when problems develop. As we saw in the last government, whether it was laziness, complacency or other motives, there were serious legitimate issues and concerns that were undermining not only a particular political party but our entire democracy. Others have spoken about this, the culture of entitlement, the sense that we were in essence a one party country, that there was only one party of legitimacy, which breeds that undermining of our democratic system. The proof of that was in the last election when voters decided to exercise their democratic right and chose a different path.

The former leader of the NDP, Ed Broadbent, is known as one of the leaders of democratic thought not only in Canada but internationally. He has led the call in Canada for a stronger democracy and a more ethical democracy. When Mr. Broadbent was in this House he raised the call for a number of changes that would lead to democratic and ethical reforms. I want to briefly outline those.

He called for democratic accountability, a fundamental respect for the voters who elect us to office. That means when voters elect us to represent a political party, we cannot just disregard those voters' wishes and cross the floor and represent another political party without going to those same voters to seek their endorsement for that move.

He called for fixed election dates so that no party could skew the outcome of an election by having complete control over when an election should take place.

He called for spending limits and transparency conditions on leadership contests. It is one thing to have limits on parties, but because parties are largely financed by the public, these principles around accountability should apply to leadership contests.

● (1140)

He called for electoral reform and a reworking of our antiquated first past the post system, so that the true views and desires of Canadian voters would be reflected in this House with a representative number of MPs.

He called for an end to unregulated lobbying and political cronyism, the revolving door between lobbyists, government staff and political staff. He called for tougher laws on the disclosure of fees and expenditures for lobbyists.

He called for a more ethical approach to government appointments, that the thousands of officials appointed to agencies, boards, commissions and crown corporations should be more democratically chosen and subject to the scrutiny of this House.

He also called for stronger access to information rules that would allow Canadians greater information about the behaviour of their government.

The bill before us today fails to live up to many of the goals outlined by Mr. Broadbent. However, Bill C-2 does make some progress and in that sense should be supported. I want to acknowledge that there are significant amendments made by the NDP which strengthen Bill C-2 and increase the likelihood of accountability and greater democracy in our country.

One of the areas to which there has been a real strengthening of the bill due to the efforts of my party is around the public appointments commission. As the vice-chair of the government operations and estimates committee, I was the member who introduced a motion rejecting the proposed head of the government's proposed appointments commission, Mr. Gwyn Morgan.

I was supported on that motion not only by other opposition members on that committee who joined me in rejecting his candidacy but by writers in *Canadian Business* magazine who said, "But making a partisan Tory (and party fundraiser) head of a department designed to usher in 'more open, honest and accountable government for Canadians' just wasn't a good fit from Day 1".

More recently, in the *Globe and Mail* there was an article about how this person who was hailed by the Canadian Council of Chief Executives as the best possible person in the entire country for this position has gone from hero to pariah. Clearly, that was a good move to have his appointment rejected.

What we did was beef up the public appointments commission which was the key thing. It basically means now that patronage is against the law. The bill requires that there be accountability and openness when it comes to appointing people to all of the thousands of positions in agencies, boards and crown corporations.

This is what Canadians want. Canadians want the person who is the best equipped, the best qualified person to be in that position, and not someone who happens to be in the good books of the person doing the appointing.

The important thing now is that, because of the NDP amendment, the Prime Minister will have to consult with all political leaders prior to making appointments to the commission. The appointment process itself will be much fairer. This is a very significant change with which the NDP is very happy.

In addition, the NDP introduced new and stricter rules to stop the revolving door between lobbyists and senior levels of government. People do not want someone who is one day advocating for a particular company or organization, being paid for that, and in the next moment working in a minister's office. Canadians want clear rules to stop this action.

● (1145)

We were able to get some improvements to Canada's access to information laws, including broadening the act substantially to include all government institutions. This is not where Canadians would like it to be in terms of full access to information, but largely, thanks to my colleagues in this section of the House we have made significant changes.

We have strengthened parts of the Canada Elections Act, including outlawing the use of trust funds and lowering donation limits to \$1,000. We have tightened the conflict of interest rules allowing any Canadian to make complaints to the new conflict of interest and ethics commissioner. We have also included protection of first nations rights within the act.

Government Orders

Canadians expect us as parliamentarians to do our job not only to represent their interests on the issues of the day, but also to be constantly reviewing the process of how we do our work. The solution for problems to democracy is a stronger democracy with more democracy. While this accountability act does not lead us to where Mr. Broadbent and the New Democratic Party would like us to be in terms of full accountability, it takes us another step down the path.

This bill has been debated, discussed, amended and scrutinized very thoroughly. Canadians want us to pass this bill into law and get going on the kinds of changes that will improve accountability in this country and strengthen our democracy.

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I listened to my hon. colleague's speech with great interest because there are major steps that need to be advanced.

Picking up on what the Treasury Board President has said about shining a light into dark places, I would be very interested in seeing if he would be willing to shine the light just a little to the left of him and down one row because there are certainly lots of questions being raised in that direction in terms of the heritage minister and her key links with lobbyists.

I refer the House to a speech given last week by Glenn O'Farrell, president of the Canadian Association of Broadcasters. He stated that there was:

—an unprecedented level of regulatory review, from telecommunications, to radio, to the future of television in Canada...we need to pick up the pace.

The message from that industry is clear. It wants the government to move on its little wish list. I am sure the hon. member already knows that Glenn O'Farrell ran a large fundraiser for the heritage minister when she was in opposition last year. In fact, it was run in the boardrooms of Corus Entertainment.

I would like to follow up on this with a newspaper quote where it states:

This cloud over Canadian Heritage policy could not come at a worse time. With the need for a new CRTC chair, the prospect of a new policy initiative to address the future of Canadian broadcasting and content rules, and the focus on copyright reform, the department promises to be in the spotlight in the months ahead. These initiatives may now be forced to share that spotlight with a regular stream of questions about [the heritage minister's] fundraising activities that could leave Canadians asking whether there is a hefty price tag associated with key government policies.

The hon. member comes from a city that is dependent on broadcasting. There are thousands of jobs in the television industry in Toronto. I would like to ask if she has any suggestions that this government might want to look at in order to help keep the heritage minister on the straight and narrow, to have her listen to all groups and not just key lobbyists who meet with her at fundraisers. Is there a way that we can work with the heritage minister so she could have a broader input apart from the people who write cheques for her?

Ms. Peggy Nash: Mr. Speaker, it is clear that we are elected in this House by the communities where we live, by the citizens in our ridings. We are not elected by lobbyists, by corporations or special interests. Therefore, our behaviour in the House and the actions that we take must be in the best interests of the communities that we represent.

In my community, there are many people who depend on the cultural sector for their livelihoods. We have artists, musicians, painters, film producers, television broadcasters and all kinds of people who work in the cultural sector. These are people who want to see cultural policies in Canada that defend Canadian interests, that speak about Canadian stories, that create jobs in Canada, and that help Canadians converse one with the other across our country and with all the multiplicity of cultures and peoples that we have in Canada.

If the minister is focusing her attention on the narrow needs and goals of a particular lobby group to the detriment of Canadians who depend on our government and on our regulators to defend their interests, to defend their culture, to preserve their jobs, and create new jobs in this sector, then I believe that this a grave issue that should be addressed by parliamentarians.

I know that in my community many people have contacted me about the cultural sector and want me to speak out on this. I am concerned that Bill C-2 does not go far enough in protecting us from lobbyists and I thank my hon. colleague for raising this issue again and reminding us about how we need to keep working in this area.

● (1150)

Mr. Bill Siksay (Burnaby—Douglas, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I want to ask my colleague a question about some of the things that did not get addressed in the accountability act. I know she talked briefly about that. She talked about the work of our former colleague, Ed Broadbent, in the area of accountability.

One of the places where I think Canadians think that we are not being held accountable to their wishes when they vote in elections is around the whole question of representation in the House, the whole question of proportional representation.

I know that in British Columbia we have had in recent years a lengthy process looking at the question of how we might change our electoral system to be more accountable to the wishes of voters. I know that it did not make it on the agenda of the last Parliament. It has not made it on the agenda of this Parliament. Many people in my constituency still feel that we need to make those kinds of changes to bring real accountability to this place, real accountability to the people who elect us and send us here to represent them.

Would the member comment on the whole question of proportional representation and some of the things that are not in the legislation that we are debating today?

Ms. Peggy Nash: Mr. Speaker, 90% of the world's democracies use a system of proportional representation, even those which formerly used a first past the post system. They do this because it is more respectful of the wishes of the electorate. It gives a truer picture of the desire of the people for their political representation. I thank my hon. colleague for raising this issue.

Government Orders

I want to give a couple of brief examples of how our current system skews the political process. In the last two general elections, the Liberals had 50% fewer seats in western Canada than they would have had under a proportional representation system. However, there are situations such as that of the previous Reform Alliance Conservatives, who were consistently underrepresented in Ontario even though they did get a number of seats. When Preston Manning was leader, he got 20% of the vote in Ontario, but how many seats? Zero. That does not seem to represent the wishes of the electorate.

Today in the House of Commons, the Bloc Québécois has 16 more seats than it should have under a proportional representation system. Certainly the NDP should have 48 seats in the House of Commons, not 19.

I say to my hon. colleagues that if we are truly talking about democracy and the wishes of the people of Canada to have a Parliament that represents their views and interests, then something very basic is that every vote should count. For every vote truly to count, we should have a system that includes proportional representation.

Commissions have recommended this. The Canadian law commission has recommended it. A quarter of a century ago, the Pépin-Robarts task force recommended that this system needed to be changed because it does a great disservice to Canadian people and to Canadian unity in that it skews regional representation in Canada.

Bill C-2 has failed to address this issue. That is very unfortunate, because we do not often get to deal with new bills around the issues of accountability and democracy. This is truly a missed opportunity, but I would call on my hon. colleagues to keep this in mind and keep this issue on the front burner. It is an issue that we desperately need to address.

• (1155)

Ms. Alexa McDonough (Halifax, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased that my colleague from Parkdale—High Park has spoken about some of the successes reflected in Bill C-2 before us and also has highlighted some of the omissions.

It seems particularly appropriate this week that we acknowledge the tremendous contribution of the former member from Ottawa Centre, Ed Broadbent, in the work that he did around both electoral reform and the cleaning up of patronage politics in this country. It is especially appropriate this week that we acknowledge the portions of Bill C-2 that are very much attributable to some of his earlier work in the House, but also that we underscore the importance of proportional representation, because Ed Broadbent is about to be honoured very publicly on Thursday for his significant contribution to electoral reform.

That work by the former member for Ottawa Centre will be well recognized by members of the House who had the thrill, as many of us did, to sit with him in the House over that period of a year and a half prior to the last election, when he did not re-offer.

What is probably less understood and known by many members of the House is that much of the early anti-patronage work and the work to clean up electoral party financing was accomplished in a previous minority government, a minority government in which the New Democratic Party leader, David Lewis, pushed very hard and in

fact got a concession from the then Liberal government to introduce election financing legislation that for the first time required full disclosure of both sources and amounts of political party contributions.

I think it is not surprising that many of the improvements in this government bill have been brought about by very good work in that same David Lewis-Ed Broadbent tradition by my colleague from Winnipeg Centre, ably supported by the current member for Ottawa Centre.

In the few remaining moments, I want to ask the member about the issue of trust funds. It is clear that the member for Winnipeg Centre was very instrumental in pushing for much tougher regulations and provisions in the law governing the use of trust funds. To this day in Nova Scotia, unbelievably, the Liberal Party still finances its election campaigns with ill-begotten trust funds from the biggest electoral party financing scandal in the history of the province.

With respect to trust funds, is it the member's view that this is an important achievement in the bill before us, notwithstanding the omission of a number of other issues, which she has already noted?

Ms. Peggy Nash: Mr. Speaker, first I want to join with my colleague in recognizing the work of Mr. Broadbent and in saying that all of his colleagues in the House and, I believe, the people of Canada recognize his decency and the great respect he had for the trust the people put in him in being a representative in this House.

I also want to briefly say that the importance of a minority Parliament in being able to make the changes that we have been able to achieve in this bill is very significant.

I want to echo what my colleague has addressed on the issue of trust funds. Whatever we call it, money that is squirreled away, money that sloshes through the system to bankroll campaigns or various undertakings, or any kinds of things that are shrouded and hidden from the public, it is in these areas where we need to shine the light.

While I do not believe the light shines strongly enough in Bill C-2, I believe we are making progress and that some of these dark corners are little less dark because of the work we have done here over the past few months.

• (1200)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Réal Ménard (Hochelaga, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I would first like to emphasize that the Bloc Québécois supports Bill C-2 in principle and in much of its practice.

There is no denying that nothing is more important than ethics and accountability in the work of an MP. The way we practice politics and the way people have access to public office holders clearly reveals the strength of democracy, which is the beauty of our democratic system, even if it is not perfect.

Earlier, I heard my friends, the neo-Bolsheviks, talk about electoral reform, suggesting that the current system, the first past the post system, had given Bloc Québécois members over-representation in this House.

Government Orders

No matter how hard I rack my brain, I do not see how this House could possibly do without a single member of the Bloc. In fact, the Bloc Québécois caucus is a formidable democratic tool, and each and every Bloc member makes an invaluable contribution to the work of this House. Naturally, I am bound by the confidentiality of our caucus meetings, but I can assure you that every Bloc member does an outstanding job. With every voting opportunity, our constituents have the opportunity to assess the relevance of the Bloc's role, and every time, in the end, we are supported in our conviction that it is important to have a political party dedicated exclusively to defending the interests of Quebec, a party that will not compromise its principles, and one that has the ability to accurately discern what Quebecers want.

That said, of course we are not completely opposed to the idea of holding a debate on the issue of better representation. When Quebec becomes a sovereign nation, it is not certain that we will maintain the current voting system. In fact, sovereignists have thought long and hard about this issue. I am thinking of the former member for Borduas, Jean-Pierre Charbonneau, as well as André Larocque, who was deputy minister to Robert Burns, the member for Maisonneuve, in the 1970s. Robert Burns was the minister responsible for one of the most important laws enacted by René Lévesque's government, the democratic financing legislation, which is based on the concept of knowing on whose behalf we speak.

I remember certain discussions with American senators. In the United States, it is virtually impossible to get elected if one does not have millions of dollars. Yet, in many cases, having such a fortune means that individuals become spokespeople for special interest groups. In contrast, our democratic system makes it possible to secure financing thanks to strong popular support.

For example, during the last election campaign in Hochelaga, I spent \$25,000. Obviously, that is not very much given the number of voters in my riding. That money did not come from businesses, interest groups or lobbies. Members of the Bloc Québécois executive in my riding, Hochelaga, raised the money during meetings with grassroots activists. That is what we do every year.

Let me say a few words about Bill C-2, which was introduced by the President of the Treasury Board. The Bloc Québécois supports the underlying principles of the bill. However, much like its creator, the President of the Treasury Board, the bill is clearly not perfect. That does not prevent him from being a respectable parliamentarian, of course. The Bloc Québécois supports this bill because it provides for a ministerial code of ethics to be entrenched in the law.

● (1205)

The Bloc Québécois supports Bill C-2 because it will put an end to the tradition that enabled political staff to gain privileged entry to the public service. Of course, that is not to say that the people who work in the offices of ministers or members cannot be useful in the public service, or that they are not competent people, but we have said and we still say that they should not gain entry by a somewhat privileged mechanism but rather by means of properly conducted competitions.

The Bloc Québécois supports Bill C-2 because it gives greater power to the Auditor General, Ms. Fraser, and it gives more power to the Ethics Commissioner. It should be remembered—and obviously I

say this very seriously—that for many weeks, and indeed for several months, the Bloc Québécois has led the battle to extend the Auditor General's powers of audit and control. My former colleague, the member for Repentigny, had tabled a bill to extend the control of the Auditor General to include a certain number of foundations. The principle of the bill had been agreed to by the previous government, and it has also been accepted by the Conservative government. That is good news because these foundations hold and manage millions of dollars that come from the public treasury.

The Bloc Québécois supports Bill C-2 because it will lead to the disclosure of compulsory reports in the case of leadership races. It will restrain the potential for uncontrolled spending in the great public relations exercises that leadership races have become.

The Bloc Québécois supports Bill C-2 because it contains many of the traditional demands of the Bloc Québécois. I am happy to remind the House of the battle that several members of the Bloc Québécois fought to ensure that returning officers are chosen through a more democratic process. I see my friend, the parliamentary secretary, who is the youngest member of this House. Obviously, as everyone knows, being young is a failing from which one suffers a little less each day. However, I know that my colleague, who is the youngest member of this House, and who is also the parliamentary secretary to the minister, has worked very hard in committee.

For a long time now the Bloc Québécois has tried to justify a more democratic process for returning officers. It cannot be possible, on one hand, for a person at the riding level to be responsible for making the system work, ensuring there are no irregularities, that all rules are being followed and that all the candidates have equal chances, and, on the other, for these same returning officers to be appointed by the government. In my riding there was a returning officer who was very well respected as an individual, but who certainly was not neutral politically. Mr. Léger, a notary, served as returning officer in Hochelaga—Maisonneuve. He is a very respectable person, but he was my opponent in 1993.

In 1993, I had to show him a thing or two about elections and I won a majority by several thousand votes. It was at the time when Lucien Bouchard, one of the great sovereignists of the movement, was Premier of Quebec. He ran an absolutely extraordinary election campaign and, if my memory serves me correctly, the Bloc Québécois won 49% of the vote and 55 members were elected. We clearly had a very strong hold. It was a young political party and there were a number of young members such as Pierre Brien and Michel Bellehumeur. At the time, yours truly was in his early thirties. I was 31 when I was elected and I am 44 now, but I feel just as young as I did then.

● (1210)

Obviously, I no longer have the same resources. There was a time when I could work for 15 or 16 hours without sleeping. Today, I could no longer do that.

Government Orders

To get back to the subject, and to Bill C-2, the bill contains very wise provisions to allow returning officers to be selected by competition. This was a Bloc Québécois initiative, which is to some extent reflected in Bill C-2.

The Bloc Québécois would have liked to see more democratic funding. It had also hoped that we could have refocused the provisions relating to whistleblowers. It is important that when improper conduct, bad management or fraud is witnessed by people who have responsibilities, particularly strategic responsibilities within the public service, they be able to report it to their superior and report it publicly without suffering reprisals.

An amendment has come from the other place that expands the concept of reprisal. We must of course ensure that such reprisals do not in any way prevent a public servant from pursuing a worthwhile career plan in the public service.

We support Bill C-2. In fact there are few questions that will call for more of our attention in the years to come than the question of ethics. What is our vision of public governance that meets ethical responsibilities? That is one of the questions that will concern us in the years to come.

A debate is underway in Quebec regarding the place for minorities in society. I am sure that such a debate is also taking place in other provinces. There is also the question of reasonable accommodation. How do we reconcile our broad democratic values with recognizing the place for minorities and preserving a spirit of a common public culture? How do we organize our social contract? This is what we mean by reasonable accommodation. How do we interpret the charters, be it the Quebec Charter, one of the most generous charters when it comes to human rights, and compatibility with individual values, particularly when it comes to religious convictions?

I hope that the parliamentary secretary will give us an explanation of this a little later. We do not understand why the government has not chosen to revise the Access to Information Act, when that act was part of the Conservative Party's campaign platform. When we talk about democracy, political party financing and voting methods are not the only issues; our ability to make our institutions function in a way that allows us to have access to information within a reasonable time is also an issue.

The Access to Information Act is a major concern. Recently, I had the opportunity to take part in a seminar. Three weeks ago, my party whip asked me to make a speech on a Friday at 6:30 p.m., here in Ottawa. I cannot begin to tell the House how grateful I was that he would give me this opportunity to share the stage with a number of experts on the Access to Information Act. The seminar took place at the government's conference centre. What an archaic piece of legislation.

Here is a very specific example. In June, the Bloc Québécois made about 40 requests under the Access to Information Act. To this end, we relied on our research services and on my friend, Dominic Labrie, a powerful intellectual and an extremely brilliant man who is very familiar with the whole issue of the Access to Information Act. He is a highly educated person with great intellectual finesse, as there are in all political parties.

● (1215)

As we know, there are costs associated with this. A five dollar deposit is required for each request. We must also pay for each page of information that is provided to us.

Believe it or not, we submitted those 40 or so requests for information in June, and only about five of them had been dealt with by the time I made my speech, two or three weeks ago. We have yet to receive the information that we requested back in June and this is now November, just 10 days away from the month of December. Moreover, I was told that there is an increasingly common practice whereby a fee is charged for those access to information requests, based on the number of hours of research required to get the information. I was also told that this change coincided with the arrival of the Conservatives in office. I hope that this trend will be corrected.

Again, we cannot fulfill our parliamentary duties properly and we cannot have a true democratic system if we do not have access to meaningful and conclusive information. The Bloc Québécois longs for the day when each access to information request, and its reply, will be stored in the Library of Parliament, as is the case with the notices in the order paper. It would definitely be a good thing if all parliamentarians could benefit from that information.

I have even been informed that certain departments now refuse to produce written information for strategic executive meetings, for fear that someone will request access to it.

Once again I do not understand why the government did not make more of this bill, which has much to be said for it and which the Bloc Québécois supports. Indeed our political party believes in ethics and we know that this question will be of great concern in the coming years.

Our fellow citizens will no longer accept authoritarian models, ways of doing things in which members of parliament are not fully involved in the development of public policies.

It is quite unbelievable, I repeat, that the government chose to table 200 clauses in this bill. Would it not have been better to review the Access to Information Act? I recall that the Conservatives made a commitment to modernize it. The Conservative platform even contained this promise:

A Conservative government would:

Implement the Information Commissioner's recommendations for reform of the Access to Information Act.

The Information Commissioner himself tabled a complete bill. He did the work; he proposed a complete bill in October 2005.

I think this is hard to understand.

I am going to end with the following comment, because time is running out.

The bill, once it came back from the other House, also proposed a number of points which the Bloc Québécois unfortunately could not agree with. I understand that the other House would have liked there to be a commissioner.

Government Orders

I am going to conclude by recalling three major points. For the Bloc Québécois, it is important to be able to say yes to this bill, on the basis of a number of historical battles waged by the Bloc Québécois: the appointment of returning officers by competition; more work and greater authority for the Auditor General respecting trusts and foundations; and the possibility of restricting expenditures in leadership races and making them subject to public disclosure.

We nonetheless would have liked the Access to Information Act to be modernized so that it would work better and members of parliament would have more information, and especially so that requests for access to information might be filed in the Library of Parliament.

• (1220)

We would also have liked to have a broader definition of the budget officer's role. In spite of all this, the Bloc Québécois will support the proposed amendments in Bill C-2.

Mr. Jean-Yves Laforest (Saint-Maurice—Champlain, BQ): Mr. Speaker, since yesterday, a number of members have risen and spoken to Bill C-2. Many have criticized the fact that the Senate made a number of amendments, countless amendments in fact, which took several weeks of work.

Many other members also pointed out that the study of Bill C-2 last spring was rushed and done so quickly that many witnesses could not even give proper testimony, nor was there enough time to fully explore their observations.

I would like to know my colleague's opinion concerning the fact that, after the parliamentary committee had studied the bill, it was the non-elected members of the other House who went ahead and proposed a series of amendments. I think this goes against democratic democracy to some degree, since this should normally be done by elected members.

Mr. Réal Ménard: Mr. Speaker, I want to thank my colleague from Saint-Maurice—Champlain, who is the Bloc Québécois critic on this issue, if I am not mistaken.

Certainly, the Conservative government is no stranger to contradictions. Here is one contradiction. For years, when the Conservatives were in opposition, they spoke very negatively about the Senate. What was the first thing the Prime Minister did? He went and appointed his election campaign financing head to the Senate. That took some nerve. For years, when they formed the opposition, the Conservatives spoke out against the Senate, and the first thing they did, like Pharisees, was to appoint Michael Fortier to the Senate. He has refused to run for election in Repentigny, and he heads one of the largest departments in the government, the Department of Public Works and Government Services. Yet the Conservatives find nothing wrong with this.

In public life, if you want to maintain your credibility, you cannot change your tune when you move from opposition to government. Many parliamentarians have demanded that Michael Fortier stand for election, and it is sad that he has resisted this democratic challenge.

Let us talk about the Senate. Certainly, there are excellent people in the Senate, people who are working extremely hard. I am thinking of Marcel Prud'homme and Serge Joyal. I also know that Gérard

Beaudoin worked very hard when he was in the Senate. But the calibre of the individuals does not alter the fact that when laws are passed in a representative democracy, there must be democratic legitimacy. The Senate will never have such legitimacy. Of course, senators can analyze legislation and make appropriate amendments, but the Canadian Senate will never have democratic legitimacy. That is why the Bloc Québécois believes that the Senate is an institution that should be abolished.

In the event a second house should be created, perhaps, in a sovereign Quebec, there will be a house of the regions in the National Assembly. Perhaps there will be a bicameral parliament. However, when it comes to passing legislation and participating in the legislative process, there must be democratic legitimacy, which is conferred only by a general election.

• (1225)

[English]

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

Some hon. members: Question.

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): All those in favour of the subamendment will please say yea.

Some hon. members: Yea.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): All those opposed will please say nay.

Some hon. members: Nay.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): In my opinion the yeas have it.

And five or more members having risen:

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

And the bells having rung:

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): The vote stands deferred.

* * *

**SOFTWOOD LUMBER PRODUCTS EXPORT CHARGE
ACT, 2006**

The House proceeded to the consideration of Bill C-24, An Act to impose a charge on the export of certain softwood lumber products to the United States and a charge on refunds of certain duty deposits paid to the United States, to authorize certain payments, to amend the Export and Import Permits Act and to amend other Acts as a consequence, as reported with amendment from the committee.

Government Orders

SPEAKER'S RULING

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): There are 95 motions in amendment standing on the notice paper for the report stage of Bill C-24. Motions Nos. 1 to 3, 5, 9, 10, 12, 20, 21, 23, 24, 26, 27, 29, 35, 36, 46, 53, 74, 79, 82 and 95 will not be selected by the Chair as they could have been presented in committee.

Motion Nos. 30 to 34, 37 to 45, 47 to 52, 54 to 73, 76, 78, 80, 81 and 85 to 93 will not be selected by the Chair as they were defeated in committee.

[*Translation*]

Motion No. 11 proposes to amend clause 12. The Chair has been informed that an error was found in the report to the House on Bill C-24. This situation resulted in the tabling of a motion at report stage. The error in question has to do with an amendment to an amendment that was rejected in committee on a recorded division. The report to the House indicates, in error, that the amendment to the amendment was adopted. Accordingly, the Chair thanks the hon. member for Gatineau for tabling a motion at report stage in order to correct the report, but this was not necessary. I will ask that the bill be reprinted after third reading in order to add the following amendment to clause 12:

That Bill C-24, in clause 12, be amended by replacing, in the English version, line 36, on page 7, with the following:

[*English*]

“incurred in the placement aboard the convey—”

• (1230)

[*Translation*]

Accordingly, Motion No. 11 will not be selected by the Chair.

[*English*]

All remaining motions have been examined and the Chair is satisfied that they meet the guidelines expressed in the note to Standing Order 76.1(5) regarding the selection of motions in amendment at report stage.

There are a large number of motions which have not been selected for report stage, either because they were identical to motions defeated in committee or because they could have been presented in committee.

The Chair feels that it may be appropriate to take a moment to review the selection criteria for report stage.

On March 21, 2001, the Speaker made a statement on the selection criteria for motions at report stage as follows:

First, past selection practices...will continue to apply. For example, motions and amendments that were presented in committee will not be selected, nor will motions ruled out of order in committee. Motions defeated in committee will only be selected if the Speaker judges them to be of exceptional significance.

[*Translation*]

Second, regarding the new guidelines, I will apply the tests of repetition, frivolity, vexatiousness and unnecessary prolongation of report stage proceedings insofar as it is possible to do so in the particular circumstances with which the Chair is faced. ... I also intend to apply those criteria in the original note.... Specifically, motions in amendment *that could have been presented in committee* will not be selected.

[*English*]

Consequently, the Chair selects motions which further amend an amendment adopted by a committee, motions which make consequential changes based on an amendment adopted by a committee and motions which delete a clause.

Aside from this, the Chair is loath to select motions unless a member makes a compelling argument for selection based on the exceptional significance of the amendment.

[*Translation*]

The Chair cannot predict every possible scenario, but it reminds hon. members that every bill is carefully examined in order to preserve the delicate balance between protecting the rights of the minority and the ability of the majority to exercise the right to vote.

[*English*]

Therefore, the motions will be grouped for debate as follows: Group No. 1 will include Motions Nos. 4, 25, 77, 83, 84 and 94. Group No. 2 will include Motions Nos. 6 to 8, 13 to 19, 22, 28 and 75.

[*Translation*]

The voting patterns for the motions within each group are available at the table. The Chair will remind the House of each pattern at the time of voting.

[*English*]

I shall now propose Motions Nos. 4, 25, 77, 83, 84 and 94 in Group No. 1 to the House.

MOTIONS IN AMENDMENT

Mr. Peter Julian (Burnaby—New Westminster, NDP) moved:

Motion No. 4

— That Bill C-24 be amended by deleting Clause 8.

Motion No. 25

— That Bill C-24 be amended by deleting Clause 39.

Motion No. 77

— That Bill C-24, in Clause 100, be amended by replacing line 3 on page 87 with the following:

(a) specifying any requirements or conditions that, in the opinion of the Government of Canada, should be met in order for a person to be certified as an independent remanufacturer;”

Motion No. 83

— That Bill C-24, in Clause 107, be amended by replacing lines 37 and 38 on page 89 with the following:

“which it is made but no earlier than November 1, 2006.”

Motion No. 84

— That Bill C-24, in Clause 108, be amended by replacing line 5 on page 90 with the following:

“earlier than November 1, 2006.”

Motion No. 94

— That Bill C-24, in Clause 126, be amended by replacing line 4 on page 100 with the following:

“have come into force on November 1, 2006.”

Government Orders

He said: Mr. Speaker, I stand to address this first group of motions to amend this badly botched Bill C-24. It is important to give some initial information to the public at large who are watching us today just how badly this bill has been treated. It was badly botched from the start. The negotiations were badly botched. As one person in the softwood industry notably said, Canada capitulated on everything. Subsequent to that there were further capitulations over the course of the summer. Now we have Bill C-24.

As the New Democratic Party members have been paying the most attention to this bill, we can say that the bill itself is badly flawed, badly botched. However, unbelievably the majority of the Standing Committee on International Trade, the Bloc, Conservative and Liberal members, refused to hear from witnesses across the country from coast to coast to coast who wanted to testify on this badly botched bill.

Unbelievably we heard from only two witnesses and they raised the issue about the poor drafting of the bill and some of the perverse impacts of this horrible legislation. Yet the committee just ramrodded through this legislation. In fact, half of the bill was not even considered in committee. There was no debate whatsoever on amendments. In fact, many of the amendments that were rejected were not even considered by the committee because the committee did not want to do its due diligence on the bill. We are now at report stage and amendments are being brought forward. What do these amendments do?

In the first group of amendments we are endeavouring to repair the incredible botch job that was done by the government on Bill C-24. One of the two witnesses who were allowed to testify before the Conservatives and Liberals shut down any testimony testified to the fact that there is this perverse double taxation in the bill itself. Because the government was not able to do its homework properly, we end up taxing twice any company that actually goes through the EDC formula. Unbelievably, that means that the companies that go through the Export Development Corporation are the ones in a sad, sad position with their cashflow and they actually do not get back 80¢ on the dollar. They get back 67¢ because the government in botching the drafting of this bill has taxed them twice. It is unbelievable.

Now that the government with the support of its Liberal allies has botched the bill, we are endeavouring to give an opportunity to those companies to go back to the minister and get refunds on the money that they should not have paid in the first place. That is why I moved Motion No. 25. We are essentially saying that since the bill does not allow those companies to come back except under the very strict provisions of the Financial Administration Act, those companies should have the opportunity to get back the money they should not have paid in the first place.

The reason most companies have rejected the government's plan, the reason that less than 50% of companies signed on to this strange, bizarre Export Development Corporation punitive tax, double taxation as we know, is no secret. The reason is the ruling on October 13 where the Court of International Trade in the United States said that Canada is entitled to get back every single penny. We do not have to go through this sellout. We do not have to go through the lost jobs, 4,000 to date since this badly botched deal was put in place provisionally, 4,000 jobs including many in my community.

We have a badly botched sellout. We have a badly botched deal. We have a committee that was out of control refusing to do its due diligence on the actual provisions of the bill. Far be it from the NDP to have to approve the bill because we disagree with the sellout in principle, but the committee did not do its due diligence. It is completely irresponsible. That means to softwood communities across the country we are now dealing with a deeply flawed bill.

There were virtually no witnesses, no due diligence and now double taxation. As usual, the NDP is having to be the effective opposition. We are saying to wait, that this bill is even bad from a Conservative point of view. Is there not one Conservative willing to stand and say, "I am sorry, we screwed up. We are going to try to correct the most egregious errors in this deal"? No.

● (1235)

Let us look at another element that we are trying to adjust. A committee that is out of control has adopted definitions for tenure that the United States pushed and on which the Conservative government just capitulated. They directly affect the B.C. timber sales program. It is unbelievable. Now tenure is defined the way the United States defines tenure. It means that the timber sales program which is designed with a sealed bid process is now defined as having tenure, which means the United States under anti-circumvention can raise the B.C. timber sales program that was directly put in place to try to get around those punitive illegal measures of the United States. It is unbelievable.

An hon. member: The more we learn.

Mr. Peter Julian: As my colleague from Winnipeg Centre has just pointed out, the more we learn about this deal, the more we realize this House is failing in its responsibility to softwood communities across the country. It is failing utterly and completely.

There are double taxation provisions and no provision to allow those companies to go back and push for the kind of justice they should be seeing. Clause 39 has to be deleted.

We are looking through these various motions, Mr. Speaker, that you have regrouped, I would say somewhat hastily. I would disagree with the provisions that you put forward.

Government Orders

The other aspect we touch on in Motions Nos. 83 and 84 is the fact that we have a deal that was put into place, badly botched from the beginning, that forced companies to pay a double tax at the border. When this was hastily and shoddily thrown together on October 11, the illegal American tariffs were still in place. It went from a 10.8% tariff to an additional 15% tariff that companies had to pay. They have to pay this and the government has no idea for how long. There were no witnesses allowed, but when we questioned officials from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Trade, they had no idea when the illegal American tariffs had been taken off. We stepped forward and asked very clearly, why would we put into place provisions of this agreement when illegal American tariffs were still in place? Why would we pay 15% on top of 10.8%? We have said in these motions very clearly that the putting into effect of this agreement has to be November 1.

There was absolute chaos at the border. We have seen absolute chaos in the months since this was provisionally put into effect. There are 4,000 lost jobs, nearly 300 in my community. There will be other members of the New Democratic Party, the only party that is standing up for Canadians on this issue, who will be stepping forward and talking about job losses in their communities as well. There has been utter chaos at the border and companies are paying a double tax. They are paying the 10.8% and an additional 15% on top of that. We have said that the date has to be November 1.

For goodness' sake, 4,000 jobs have been lost because of the incompetence of the federal government, because of its complete lack of understanding of softwood in British Columbia and in other parts of western Canada. Those jobs have been lost. The government, even if it insists on ramming through this deal with the support of the Liberals, has to stand up and realize it made an egregious error. It screwed up. It implemented the deal hastily. To save face for our intellectually malnourished Minister of International Trade we had to rush this job. Because we rushed this job, the government screwed up and companies have had to pay twice.

It makes sense that we make adjustments to the bill, a bill with which we disagree profoundly, but we are trying to save the government from itself, so that the provisions of the deal take effect November 1. There need to be provisions for the companies where double taxation took place at the border, where companies paid the Americans these forced export taxes of an additional 15%.

• (1240)

Bill C-24 is horrible for the softwood companies and the 4,000 families whose breadwinners have lost their jobs. They can attest to that already with four weeks of absolute collapse of the softwood sector because of the incompetence of the government. If the government is absolutely set on ramming this bill through with the support of the Liberals, at least the government should make some provisions for the disastrous situation it has set up.

Disaster is not too strong a word when we are talking about 4,000 lost jobs. We are talking about raw log exports being stimulated now because, as we were told this summer when we saw the softwood agreement coming, this is a recipe for raw logs from Canada creating American jobs. Setting up the 15% export tax, self-imposed, when we won in the Court of International Trade on October 13 is absolutely absurd.

Now we have a bill that is even worse than the sellout, a bill on which the homework was not done, the due diligence was not done. The Standing Committee on International Trade completely failed Canadians. The ministry completely failed Canadians. The minister who has failed his constituents has now broadened his reach. He has betrayed everybody.

We have a situation where the implementation of the softwood agreement is being imposed at the same time as the illegal American tariffs are still being imposed. It is absolutely senseless and absurd.

In this corner of the House there is one political party that Canadians know will stand up for them and will stand up for softwood communities. My colleague from Timmins—James Bay and I went to Thunder Bay. We talked to softwood workers there. They told us how badly they feel about this. They have seen mill closures in northwestern Ontario.

I was in northern Manitoba a week and a half ago where there have been layoffs and shutdowns because of this badly botched softwood sellout. In northern Saskatchewan, in Alberta, in British Columbia there will be public meetings coming up and we will be going into Conservative ridings. This has been a badly botched deal. It is a badly flawed bill. The government and members in all four corners of the House have to make some adjustments to it so that the most egregious impacts are not continued to be felt across the country.

• (1245)

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I rise today with the news from back home that Tembec in Timmins is gone. One of the fundamental mills in our region has gone out of business. Smooth Rock Falls is down. Opasatika is down. Red Rock is down. Ignace is down. Kenora is gone. Dryden is gone. Across the line from us in Quebec, Malartic is down. Grand Remous is down. Béarn is down.

I have spoken to workers in so many of those communities. They understand very clearly that there is a fundamental disinterest on the part of the government about the future not just of their industry, not just of their jobs, but of their communities. That is very clear.

What was very confusing to some of the people I spoke to, particularly along the Highway 17 corridor into northwestern Ontario, is why the Liberal Party has worked with the Conservatives to force through these amendments to cut down debate in committee to 60 seconds so that the effects of this would not be reviewed. Why was it that the Liberal members in committee worked with the Conservatives to ensure there would be no public hearings?

When we got to Thunder Bay everybody knew that Thunder Bay was going to be one of the main areas where we would have committee hearings. Lo and behold there were two Liberal members in that community who broke ranks with the rest of northern Ontario. They were standing proud for the bill and standing proud for this sellout. I was wondering at the time whether the Liberal Party was trying to stop hearings in northern Ontario to save the embarrassment of their own members who signed on to this bill.

Government Orders

The hon. member has been in Thunder Bay as well. He has spoken to the workers. Does he think perhaps that the Liberals are going along with the Conservatives in order to try to protect ridings in northwestern Ontario where members have sold out their own workers and sold out their own communities?

Mr. Peter Julian: Mr. Speaker, the member for Timmins—James Bay is absolutely right. He has been one of the most vocal people in standing up for northern Ontario. He has been a champion of northern Ontario, as has the member for Sault Ste. Marie. We have two members in the House who have been standing up for northern Ontario jobs.

The reality, as the member for Timmins—James Bay has just pointed out, is that we are hemorrhaging jobs in northern Ontario because of this badly botched softwood sellout. We are hemorrhaging, with closures and layoffs right across northwestern Ontario. We saw it in Thunder Bay, but we are seeing it right across northern Ontario.

The Liberals, who have been saying that somehow they are opposed to this, have been working with the Conservatives and pushing this along. I do not know how a single Liberal member from northern Ontario can stand up and say that the Liberals have been fighting the good fight after what happened at the Standing Committee on International Trade, when the Liberals did the Conservatives' dirty work to push this bill through.

The reality is that we are in the House now debating Bill C-24 in its badly botched form because of the Liberal Party, because of those Liberal members. They are the ones who pushed this through. They are the ones who said no, they did not care about softwood, that was just for the TV cameras. Now we are in the situation where we have a badly flawed bill that does not even do what the Conservatives said it was going to do because they screwed up the definitions and badly botched the drafting. Now we have a situation where northern Ontario is going to pay the price for having Liberals who are refusing to stand up for that region.

Not only are we seeing this in northern Ontario, but we are seeing it right across the country. We are seeing lost jobs everywhere, from B.C. right through to northern Quebec, and those lost jobs are a direct result of this badly botched softwood sellout.

• (1250)

Mr. Pat Martin (Winnipeg Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have one specific question for my colleague. It stems from a previous speech that he made on this subject in the same context of saying that the Liberals are doing the Tories' dirty work in committee.

Is it not true that Canada is in effect doing the Americans' dirty work in their long known animosity toward the softwood industry in Canada? Is it not true that some of the money left on the table will in fact be used against the best interests of Canadians by our American enemies in this trade issue?

Mr. Peter Julian: Mr. Speaker, that is an excellent question. In fact, it is the case and, even worse in Bill C-24, what we are adopting and what the Liberals and Conservatives are trying to foist on the House, with the support of the Bloc Québécois, is a bill that provides American definitions of virtually everything, including definitions of tenure and of related and unrelated people. All of those issues now

go to the American coalition and it now has in place definitions that the Americans will be able to use against us.

Even better, thanks to the Conservatives' generosity and with the support of the Liberals, they now have half a billion dollars—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): Resuming debate, the hon. member for Nanaimo—Alberni.

Mr. James Lunney (Nanaimo—Alberni, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I see that the NDP members are patting themselves on the back in their mutual admiration society down there, but some of the propaganda they put forward I think is reprehensible.

They claim that only 50% of the companies actually support this agreement when in fact we know more than 90% of the industry supports the agreement and signed on to the deal.

They claim that the recent ruling on October 13 of the Court of International Trade in the United States would have brought back all the money, as if that were the last court ruling there would have been. Those members ought to know how many court rulings, filings and counter-filings there have been on this file.

It is misleading to the public to suggest that this would not have been appealed. We know that the U.S. industry said it immediately would have appealed that decision and thus tied us up for several more years of punishing duties. This government has taken action.

I also think it is reprehensible for the member to imply that these 4,000 lost jobs are the responsibility of this government. I was elected in the year 2000. The former softwood lumber agreement expired in 2001. It was the previous administration that sat on this for so many years that it resulted in punishing job losses in my riding, as well as the member's, and in other coastal communities and indeed across Canada, while the previous government dithered and failed to take action.

This government, as soon as we took office, did take action. We took action quickly. We made it a priority. The Prime Minister immediately appointed the new ambassador to the United States, Michael Wilson, as our representative, and we made this a high priority file. It got high level meetings, including that between the Prime Minister and the president of the United States, and that got things moving, with teams mobilized on both sides of the border to resolve this issue.

The result of that agreement is that on July 1 we initialed a legal text. By September 12, the Minister of International Trade and U.S. trade representative Susan Schwab had signed an agreement. On September 18, a notice of ways and means was tabled in this House which we are still debating today, with amendments, as we move forward in this process.

The highlights of the agreement include: the revocation of the punishing U.S. countervailing and anti-dumping duties; the return of over \$4.4 billion in duties collected by the U.S. since 2002; the safeguarding of the provinces' ability to manage their forest resources; a provision ensuring that revenues from the border measures will stay in Canada; and a range of initiatives to enhance binational cooperation and the development of the North American lumber industry.

Government Orders

By October 30, the first cheques were already going back to our cash-strapped industry, with \$950 million being returned to Canadian forestry companies, about half of that to our British Columbia companies, including coastal companies that have been suffering very much as a consequence of those punishing duties.

I want to address an issue that is a big concern for coastal communities, particularly in my riding, and that is the issue of log exports. It is an issue of great concern to coastal communities, particularly on Vancouver Island, and particularly the two central ridings of Nanaimo—Alberni, my own, and the one south of us, Nanaimo—Cowichan.

I am glad to say that there is a review team looking at this issue of log exports. It involves a couple of high profile people with extensive experience. Bill Dumont is the former chief forester at Western Forest Products, a man well respected in the industry, and Don Wright is a former deputy forests minister who is also very well respected in the industry. Mr. Dumont is a Vancouver Island resident with 35 years of forestry experience who served as chief forester for Western Forest Products, where he earned a reputation for sustainable forest management, consultation, and working with first nations, and he is an award winner.

I am glad to say that consultations are under way. I am looking forward to action being taken. We have the possibility, through clause 17 in this bill, of dealing with the log export issue. There is room to deal with this issue. I want to take a moment to explain why the log issue is of concern to mid-Island areas.

As members know in regard to the private lands issue, when we are talking about log exports we have public lands and private lands. About 5.7% of the B.C. land mass is private forest lands, but more than half of that is actually on Vancouver Island, and most of it is in two ridings right in the central Island area. That is because of something that goes all the way back to Confederation: the E & N land grants. More than 139 years ago, that land was committed to building a railroad and the resources attached to it were given to the railroad company. Because of that, we have extraordinarily large masses of terrain that are private lands at present.

●(1255)

I am disappointed that, following the collapse of the agreement of 2001, neither the federal nor the provincial government had the courage to deal with the log export issue. The federal government was responsible for private lands and the provincial government was responsible for public lands. Neither government, the former Liberal government or the newly elected provincial government, had the courage to deal with the log export issue, which had the consequence of having a tariff wall on our finished log softwood lumber products while our logs were being exported without any restriction at all at that time.

It seems to me that a tariff should have been imposed while that dispute was under way. That did not happen. As a consequence, we saw a huge increase in coastal log exports during the time of this dispute.

Tremendous realignment has also been taking place in the forest industry and that is affecting the log export issue. Forest giant Weyerhaeuser conveniently owned mills on both sides of the border.

It is a huge company with about \$16 billion in assets and is bigger than our four largest forest companies combined. Before Weyerhaeuser sold to a Canadian company called Brascan, it managed to get another large chunk of land near Port Alberni released from public lands into the private sector.

The consequences, particularly for the community mid-Island around Port Alberni, have been rather devastating, in that the large amount of private land creates a situation that allows logs to be exported. The logs are vulnerable to export, particularly from this mid-Island area.

Immediately after Weyerhaeuser sold to Brascan, the company divided into two, separating the lands from the mills. At the same time, one of the largest mills in the Port Alberni area, Island Phoenix Division, happened to be moved to the land sector, Island Timberlands. Almost immediately that mill was dismantled, with the loss of about 300 jobs. Conveniently, that particular site is now available for log exports. That is a concern to people in the mid-Island area. Of concern to all of the workers is the tremendous movement toward facilitating log exports. The mill portion of Cascadia was very soon sold to the Western Forest Products division, which now controls about nine of the remaining coastal mills, and Island Timberlands is simply a land manager that can export those logs according to existing rules.

I am concerned that the existing situation has resulted in a tremendous increase in log exports. Log exports have doubled since 2001. Since 1996, the amount of coastal forest wood being exported as raw logs has increased about 10 times.

I want to say that this agreement in general has been very good for Canada. To end the impasse, the government took action on a very complicated file. Billions of dollars are coming back to our entire Canadian industry, including the coastal forest industry.

Clause 17 of the agreement allows us to take action through the governor in council. We are looking at that right now with the province and the review team to deal with this coastal log export issue. I am hopeful that we will see action. I have been discussing this issue with the Minister of International Trade and the Minister of Natural Resources. I know they are discussing it, as I have with the provincial minister, Rich Coleman, the minister of forests.

I am hopeful about the report tabled by these very capable forest experts from British Columbia on the issue of coastal log exports. There have been discussions and consultations going on over the past year. I know that they have heard from the community and I know the community is very upset.

Government Orders

In particular, people at Port Alberni have been counting the logging trucks coming out of there while the mills have been shut down, impaired or working at partial capacity. Even during the recent salmon festival, a ship pulled into the port to load logs for South Korea to be milled there while we have mills working at less than capacity right there in Port Alberni.

We are concerned about the impact of these coastal log exports. The agreement is a good agreement for Canada. We are going to move ahead, but the sidebar issue here on the coastal log exports is one that I hope we will be able to address through the provisions of clause 17. I hope we will see some action to help keep those logs get processed in Canada and on Vancouver Island and to help keep as many jobs as possible right here at home.

• (1300)

Hon. Mark Eyking (Sydney—Victoria, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I will explain later in my speech how much the Liberals are against this bill, but I have a question for the hon. member. What really bothers me is the part about leaving \$500 million in the United States to the lobbyists who are going to use it to come back at us in 24 months after the expiry of the agreement.

In the previous government I was involved in a lot of negotiations and at that time if money was going to be left on the table it was going to be for constructive uses there, whether it was Katrina victims or low income housing, but there was definitely no intent for it to be left there for the lobbyists of the U.S. forest industry.

How can the member stand here, agree with this bill wholeheartedly, and say it is a good bill when money is going to be left on the table to come back and bite us later?

Mr. James Lunney: Mr. Speaker, I know the hon. member is concerned for his rural community, but I am concerned when I hear the member object to this agreement when his government had the opportunity to solve this issue a whole lot sooner and allowed these tariffs to accumulate at the alarming rate they did, strangling our coastal communities and forest companies. The previous Liberal government was ready to sign an agreement that was not anywhere near as good as this one for the Canadian industry.

I want to draw attention to something that is a big concern while I have the opportunity. An article in Saturday's *Globe and Mail* discusses investment in the coastal industry and some of the comments are indicative of where we might be going, which concerns me.

Jimmy Pattison, a big player on the west coast, talks about making big investment in the coastal industry and that is because there is some measure of optimism that what goes down must come up. Hopefully it will come back. Russell Horner, chief executive officer of Vancouver's Catalyst Paper Corporation, stated:

There needs to be a major restructuring, with closure of a lot of assets and reinvestment in others. The government doesn't need to fund that, but they need to facilitate it...when things shut down, they need to let them shut down.

I know that is a concern because Catalyst runs the paper mill in Port Alberni. We do not want to lose that paper mill as a consequence of the lack of available raw materials from the downturn on the softwood side.

• (1305)

Mr. Peter Julian (Burnaby—New Westminster, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I was amused to see the member for Sydney—Victoria speak in opposition to the agreement when the Liberals in committee tried to ram the thing through. They did the Conservatives' dirty work for them. I like him personally, but I think it is audacious, even for a Liberal, to stand in the House now that the television cameras are back on and say that the Liberals are opposed again. It is in the House now because of the Liberal Party and Canadians will not forget that we are debating this bill in the House because of the Liberal Party.

I would like to go back to my colleague from the Conservative Party who said some things that were absolutely shameless. He knows that on October 13 the Court of International Trade ruled in our favour. This has been the line from the beginning. The Conservatives said it would be endless litigation. The Prime Minister said it would take seven years of litigation.

The member knows that following that decision customs and border protection has already started paying 100% of the dollars out to the companies that did not sign on to this badly botched deal. He also knows that most companies have not done the legal work for the Export Development Corporation because they know full well this is a badly botched deal and that they should not be involved in it. He knows all those facts.

However, the question that I have to ask is—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): The hon. member for Nanaimo—Alberni.

Mr. James Lunney: Mr. Speaker, the member talks about money coming back because of the Court of International Trade ruling. He knows full well that the U.S. industry announced that if it was not for this agreement being in place, it would have immediately launched an appeal. That appeal was not launched because of the good work of this Conservative government in arranging an agreement that prevented the U.S. industry from appealing that ruling. The member knows that to be the case and he continues with his NDP "pat themselves on the back spin".

I want to discuss another issue which is the concern about the move to private lands. Port Alberni, which has been hit so hard by this issue, has also been hit hard by rain recently. Next to the town of Port Alberni is a huge tract of land on the Beaufort Range that has been the subject of extensive logging because of private land practices there. In fact, back in January there was an investigation. Forest officials were brought in to examine the blowout in the water and there was a boil water advisory as a consequence of that. There have been some very serious changes with the Private Managed Forest Land Council—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): Resuming debate, the hon. member for Sydney—Victoria.

Hon. Mark Eyking (Sydney—Victoria, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise to speak at report stage of Bill C-24, commonly referred to as the softwood lumber bill. It is with great disappointment that we have witnessed some of the actions of the members opposite trying to make our committee non-functional.

Government Orders

The hon. member said that he liked me, but it is with great sadness that I find that the hon. member is taking me off his Christmas card list. This is not the spirit of the season and I hope he reconsiders.

During the 2006 election of the Conservative Party of Canada it outlined its softwood lumber strategy. In that platform the Conservatives promised to be tough with the American government, defend the Canadian softwood lumber industry, and stand up for the forestry worker and help the struggling communities.

Looking closely at the Conservative platform, specifically the small section on forestry, we see several promises. I would like to take a moment to go through a few of those promises today and how they apply to Bill C-24. One promise was to get tough with the Americans on this file. The Conservatives promised they would: "Demand that the U.S. government play by the rules on softwood lumber".

I do not think that anyone who read this promise thought for a second that what the Conservatives really meant was they would turn their back on years of hard fought negotiations, turn their back on the cornerstones of the North American Free Trade Agreement, and turn their back on the sustainability of forestry communities. In their haste to appease the Americans and score some political points they capitulated on issue after issue.

Over the years our previous Liberal government fought time and time again through trade panels and international dispute resolution mechanisms to win battle after battle on softwood lumber. Whether it was at WTO or NAFTA, time and again we won those rulings. Admittedly, time and again the Americans appealed these rulings. Protecting their domestic lumber industry was paramount. One need only look at the Byrd amendment to see the lengths they would go through to secure their industry and by extension, the power of the lumber industry of the United States was going to work against us.

Big lumber in the U.S. wanted to limit access to Canadian softwood lumber into what the Americans perceived as their God-given domestic markets despite NAFTA and WTO rulings. Quite frankly they lobbied, bullied and pushed, and dragged out the process in the hope of maximizing their profits and waiting for someone to come along and give in to their demands. That opportunity materialized in the form of the Conservative government across the floor. So desperate were the Conservatives to get a deal, to show action on this file, that they stormed ahead and committed to a flawed agreement.

This agreement has concerning implications, not only for the softwood lumber industry but for other Canadian producers. Polls show that Americans are in support of free trade in principle. In fact, 66% of Americans are in favour of free trade; however, this support crumbles the second that the so-called free trade is not in their best interests.

This is not entirely surprising, but it does point to the fact that if today we capitulate on the softwood lumber, what will be next? Will it be beef, automobiles or grain? Who knows what is going to be next? That they have given in on this file shows lack of resolve, again for cheap political points. The Prime Minister pointed out some kind of great new bond with the American administration but is, frankly, a travesty.

This brings my comments on Bill C-24 to another promise made by the Conservative Party in its blue book. On page 19 in the Conservative 2006 platform it states that the Conservatives would defend the rights of Canadian producers and demand the "return of the more than \$5 billion in illegal softwood lumber tariffs to Canadian producers". We on this side of the House know only too well that the Conservatives are not that good with the math. In 1993 we inherited their deficit mess and we worked long and hard to balance the books of this mismanagement.

• (1310)

That being said, here we are today, and the Conservatives have lopped off a full \$1 billion from their promise. That is \$1 billion in illegal collected duties. That is \$1 billion of our Canadian economy. To lop this right off and give it to the American administration and to the lumber industry, not only demonstrates the Conservatives are bad at math but they are bad negotiators. It is clear to all but the party opposite that at least half of this funding will be used by the American lumber industry to fund legal and political attacks against our industry.

Can we imagine \$500 million of Canadian money being used by the American lumber industry to lobby against us? It is unbelievable. The Americans must have thought it was Christmas back in the spring when this deal was being made, and it will be Christmas again when the legislation is passed.

The Conservatives are throwing away the lumber industry to the wolves. With Bill C-24 they have backed the Canadian softwood lumber industry into a corner, and what is worse, they have given the American lumber industry a stick, a \$500 million stick. What is more, after just 24 months, Canada's proud new government has given its opponents an escape clause to walk away from the deal. What shrewd negotiations, they have given away all we have gained through our trade agreement resolution process.

They have given opposing industries in the United States funds to lobby for two years against our industry, at which time they can pull the plug and possibly gain increased domestic and international ports again, financed by our Canadian funds. That is how the government protects its domestic industry. That is how a government fights on the international stage for just treatment.

Recently, the Prime Minister has been going around suggesting that he does foreign affairs differently than the past government. He does it differently all right. He walks a different walk and he talks a different talk indeed. He is walked over by the Americans, has miscommunications with the Chinese, and he ignores the European Union. That is hardly a stellar new approach.

Government Orders

Realizing my time is short, we could talk all afternoon on the travesty done here. I want to finish my comments by remarking briefly on the excellent work of my colleague, the Liberal critic for international trade, the member of Parliament for Beauséjour.

In the House we are all aware that Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, Prince Edward Island and Newfoundland and Labrador traditionally receive what is called the Atlantic exclusion. This exclusion recognizes that the lumber industry in Atlantic Canada is different because it is primarily conducted on privately owned land. The Americans have perceived this to be more in line with their domestic market and have therefore waived the tariffs that they impose on the softwood lumber imports from the rest of Canada.

When the recent softwood lumber deal was struck, the exclusion was in that agreement. However, when Bill C-24 was tabled in the House of Commons, the legislation did not have the same language. The Maritime Lumber Bureau raised these concerns with the hon. member for Beauséjour and other parliamentarians. The result was an amendment which was passed at committee to make the language more clear to ensure the continuation of the Atlantic exclusion.

I want to applaud my colleague's work on this amendment and his efforts to work out a deal so the new wording in the bill could be included and the exclusion maintained in exchange for our cooperation with some of the amendments put forward in committee.

We hope that the government resists the urge to roll back these improvements that are part of the report stage amendments. This betrayal will be noticed by the provincial governments, and must make members, like the member for Cumberland—Colchester—Musquodoboit Valley, very happy with the changes in these rollbacks.

Despite this agreement at committee, I want to be very clear that our party does not support Bill C-24. It is flawed legislation brought back by the Bloc and the Conservatives where possibly they tried to make improvements such as the Atlantic exclusion. The reality is that we have been duped. We can only hope that our interventions here at report stage will make members in the Conservative Party come to their senses and pressure their leaders to have the bill withdrawn from the House and negotiate a new deal for the betterment of all softwood lumber producers.

● (1315)

Mr. Peter Julian (Burnaby—New Westminster, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I do not know how to take the intervention of the member for Sydney—Victoria.

The Liberal members on the committee rammed through Bill C-24 and refused debate on most of the bill. Aside from the section on the maritime lumber exemption, which we in the NDP supported, the Liberals rammed through every section. Now the member for Sydney—Victoria stands in the House and says that the Liberal Party is opposed to Bill C-24.

The reason Bill C-24 is in the House today is because of the Liberal Party. The Liberals were the instigators. They were the ones who pushed this bill along. It would still be in committee and we would still be looking at changing some of the most egregious errors that were made had it not been for Liberal members ramming it through.

I do not know how to take the member's intervention. Is it possible that he has finally realized that the Liberals made an egregious error and they are apologizing to Canadians from coast to coast for having rammed through Bill C-24 and having done the Conservatives' dirty work? I hope that is the case but I think it is another example of Liberal double-talk. The reality is that the bill is in the House today because of Liberal support.

We know the bill is bad for Canadians but it is the Liberals who forced it through. The bill is here in the House now, after being rammed through at record speed, because of Liberal Party support.

The NDP has been the only party actively standing up and saying that with the thousands of lost jobs that have resulted since the bill was rammed through provisionally a month ago, with the billion dollars that we are giving away, despite a court decision that says we do not need to give away a single penny, with the export tax that is leading to job losses and shutting down value added production in this country and the fact that this deal stimulates raw log exports, we must ask why the Liberal Party forced this bill through.

● (1320)

Hon. Mark Eyking: Mr. Speaker, that is quite a question. The reality is that the committee was becoming quite dysfunctional. Mostly because of the NDP filibustering, the committee was not going to get past the first clause.

We all knew that the Bloc and the Conservatives would push the bill through committee. We, being the wise Liberals, the party of the centre, we tried to get some amendments in at committee that would help the lumber industry, not only in Atlantic Canada but right across Canada. We made the best of the situation. We cancelled the filibustering that was going on by the NDP and the rhetoric that was not making any sense.

Yes, we pushed some amendments through because, at the end of the day, the Bloc and the Conservatives were going to push the bill through and we needed to make some constructive changes to the bill. Those are the changes we are pushing for and the changes we still want to see but we are adamantly against Bill C-24.

We wish that in the future the NDP could be a little more cooperative at committee and make things work. It is the season and I am still waiting for my Christmas card.

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I heard that response but I can see that he is almost blushing after saying that.

The member talked about not wanting to listen to a discussion that was not constructive. Why was it that the Liberals were not interested in hearing from people across Canada? Is it that Canadians from across Canada might have something to say about this that he says we were filibustering and wasting the Liberal's time.

The member can talk to his own colleague from Thunder Bay. The committee would have had hearings in Thunder Bay but the members from the Thunder Bay area support this agreement.

Government Orders

For the member to stand up in the House and say that the Liberal Party adamantly opposes the agreement is not true. Because the Liberals cancelled the hearings across the country so people could not have input, is he saying that the people of Canada would be wasting the Liberals' time by giving their concerns?

Hon. Mark Eyking: Mr. Speaker, I am glad the hon. member spoke about the member from Thunder Bay.

Whether it is in our rural caucus or any discussions in our caucus, the member from Thunder Bay is out front and centre for the industry. He is trying to make the best of a bad situation brought about by the Conservatives.

The NDP members are trying to take this issue on as though it is their cause, that they are protecting the workers and the industry. All our great citizens need to do is to look at the blues from the committee to know that the NDP members wasted the committee's time many times by filibustering.

I hope there is some sensibility here and that some of the amendments pass so we can get on with the show.

[Translation]

Mr. Richard Nadeau (Gatineau, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I will first state the position of the Bloc Québécois on the proposed amendments to Bill C-24, Softwood Lumber Products Export Charge Act, 2006, and, then, outline the position of the Bloc Québécois on Bill C-24 per se.

The Bloc Québécois is opposed to the following amendments.

Under Motion No. 4, the government would not be required to enforce the act; that does not make much sense in the context of fiscal legislation. Motion No. 25 greatly complicates the collection of export taxes and the enforcement of the act. We understand that the New democratic Party does not want the act to come into force, but Quebec lumber companies want it to.

Motions Nos. 83 and 84 would have the act become effective as of November 1. The fact of the matter is, however, that the anti-dumping duties were removed on October 12. Adopting these two motions would mean leaving the lumber trade unregulated for two weeks, which is contrary to the terms of the agreement.

To help members understand the position of the Bloc Québécois on the thorny issue of Canada-U.S. relations with respect to softwood lumber, I will describe once more our party's approach.

It is important to understand that the Bloc Québécois is unenthusiastically supporting Bill C-24.

This bill allows the implementation of the July 1 softwood lumber agreement between Ottawa and Washington by: setting the terms and conditions for the return to Canadian lumber companies of countervailing and anti-dumping duties representing 81% of the money currently held by Washington and about 65% of the amount that these companies have paid, taking into account variations in the exchange rate over the past four years; setting the terms and conditions for the return to Washington of the billion dollars that companies have to leave on the table; setting trade barriers that will govern the softwood lumber trade between Canada and the United

States, including export taxes and export permits; and authorizing the payment of export tax revenue to the provinces.

The industry has stated nearly unanimously that this agreement was not satisfactory. It has, however, concluded that it was better to accept this bad deal than to continue fighting. In a word, the industry is at its wit's end.

The attitude of the federal government, be it Conservative or Liberal, has left a bitter taste. By refusing its support, it has considerably weakened the industry, forcing it to accept this agreement for fear of seriously jeopardizing its future.

The Bloc Québécois, after consulting the industries and workers in the forestry sector during the summer, came to the conclusion that it had no choice but to support the agreement because the industry, with its back to the wall, could not wait any longer. To act otherwise would not have been irresponsible.

The Bloc insists, however, on stating clearly that although the bill must be approved, the government cannot claim to have settled the problems the industry is facing. The industry is dealing with structural problems and the softwood lumber agreement does not solve them.

That is why the Bloc Québécois is calling for the government to implement a series of measures this fall to assist the forest industry, which is facing serious difficulties at the very moment it has been weakened by a lengthy trade dispute.

We want an income support program for older workers, an economic diversification program for communities that depend on the forests and special tax status for the 128,000 owners of private woodlots in Quebec.

• (1325)

In addition, we want an increase in funding for the Canadian model forest program of the Canadian Forest Service, and special tax treatment for the \$4.3 billion in countervailing and anti-dumping duty that will be refunded by the American authorities to recognize the losses incurred by companies. We also want accelerated amortization of equipment; a program to stimulate innovation and improve productivity within the forest industry; a market diversification and wood marketing program; and, finally, financial compensation for maintaining forest access roads.

Some of these measures will become meaningless if they are not introduced this year, a pivotal year for the industry. The Bloc Québécois is counting on the Minister of Finance to properly respond to these needs when he makes his financial and economic update announcement.

Bill C-24 contains legislative measures to implement the softwood lumber agreement of last July 1 between the governments of Canada and the United States.

All of the provisions take effect from October 1, 2006. Since the bill was not yet approved on that date, the measures that it contains will be retroactive to October 1, 2006.

It introduces an export control system in the softwood lumber sector, which I will now describe.

Government Orders

Ironically, this control still takes the form of amendments to the Export and Import Permits Act. This act is normally used to control trade in arms and dangerous substances or to limit trade with particular countries under economic or military sanctions. Here, though, it is the products of Canadian firms that are being hit by the restrictions in the act.

In provinces like Quebec that choose to be subject to a lower export tax but have a ceiling placed on their exports, the bill provides that exporters must acquire a licence, which is a kind of export permit. It will enable Ottawa to ensure that companies cannot exceed the quota allocated to them under the agreement.

The methods of allocating export quotas are not specified in the act. This will be done later by regulation. The Government of Quebec has suggested that 94% of the quota should be allocated to companies on the basis of their past exports, with the remaining 6% available on a first come, first served basis.

The Quebec industry was concerned that the agreement provided for quotas to be allocated on a monthly basis—one-twelfth of the annual quota—and that the possibilities of exceeding this monthly quota in case of especially large deliveries were so limited that companies would be unable to honour their contracts or even reach their full annual quotas. We must remember that the construction industry is cyclical and lumber deliveries tend therefore to vary considerably from one month to another.

This issue still has not been resolved, and the government has not made any specific promises. At the most, the binational group responsible for ensuring that the agreement works well will deal with the problem. The Bloc Québécois hopes that the government will try through this binational group to make the monthly export ceilings more flexible. In order for this to be done, the bill already provides all the latitude needed to accommodate greater flexibility because things are done through regulation.

I could go on explaining the entire bill in this way, but I will stop here, Mr. Speaker.

● (1330)

Mr. Peter Julian (Burnaby—New Westminster, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I appreciated the member for Gatineau's speech, but I do not understand. I do not understand the Bloc Québécois' position at all.

Since the provisional implementation of this agreement, 2,000 jobs have been lost in Quebec. Jobs have been lost in Abitibi-Témiscamingue, plants have been shut down in Abitibi, and jobs have been lost in Saguenay-Lac-Saint-Jean and on the North Shore. In short, more jobs have been lost in Quebec than elsewhere in Canada. Yet the Bloc still says it will support the agreement. It will support the bill even though we all know it is a bad deal and not at all in the best interest of Quebecers.

We also know that this agreement has an anti-circumvention clause, which also appears in the bill, that directly affects Quebec's power to act. This clause forces the Government of Quebec to go to Washington if it wants to change its forest policy. The province has to get approval from the Bush administration for any changes even

though forest policy falls exclusively under provincial jurisdiction. Even though it is within the purview of the Government of Quebec, we have just ceded the Government of Quebec's sovereignty.

The Bloc's policies in this House are inconsistent. The Bloc is not defending the Government of Quebec's right to make changes to its forest policy, nor is it fighting for all of the jobs that were lost because of this bad deal.

Why?

● (1335)

Mr. Richard Nadeau: Mr. Speaker, I thank my hon. colleague from the NDP.

First of all, let us look carefully at this issue. The Quebec softwood lumber industry is asking us to pass this bill because it is under the gun. It is in a terrible position. The longer we wait, the harder it will be for the industry to get back on its feet. As for the anti-circumvention clause, it specifies that a country cannot act in such a way that circumvents the agreement. It is very important to understand this.

Thus, Washington could not try to limit access to its market any more than what is specified in the agreement. Compared to the years in which no further trade was possible without the Americans imposing an appalling tax, the situation will at least allow the industry to start fresh on a basis that will finally resolve this issue. This is what the industry wants, as well as the unions representing industry workers.

Ms. Diane Bourgeois (Terrebonne—Blainville, BQ): Mr. Speaker, since the beginning of the debate on Bill C-24, I keep hearing the member for Burnaby—New Westminster continually bring up the position of the Bloc Québécois on this bill. Time and time again, my colleagues from the Bloc Québécois who spoke on the bill have explained the situation of the forestry industry and the people who depend on it, with respect to the softwood lumber issue and the agreement with the U.S.

Time and time again, we have said that our industry in Quebec literally had a gun to its head; time and time again, we have said how many sawmills in Quebec had to be sold to American interests; time and time again, we have repeated that we in the Bloc Québécois stand up for our Quebec industries. We are the voice of the industries and people of Quebec in this House.

On many occasions, however, I have seen colleagues from the NDP put forward all sorts of arguments that did not take into account Quebec's position.

Why is the NDP defending the Canadian position so strongly today? Why is it shouting from the rooftops that this is not a good bill and that—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): I am sorry, but the hon. member for Terrebonne—Blainville has run out of time.

The hon. member for Gatineau now has the floor.

Mr. Richard Nadeau: Mr. Speaker, I thank my colleague for her remarks.

Government Orders

What we have here is, on the one hand, populist demagoguery and, on the other hand, a party called Bloc Québécois which is a responsible political party. Faced with the situation the softwood lumber sector is finding itself in today, the Bloc Québécois is taking a courageous and responsible position, in cooperation with the industry and the labour unions representing the workers in that industry.

[English]

Ms. Helena Guergis (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of International Trade, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is a great pleasure to rise in the House today to report on the deliberations in the Standing Committee on International Trade on Bill C-24 to implement Canada's obligations under the softwood lumber agreement.

I would like to start by thanking the committee for its close study of the bill. The members worked hard across all party lines to put forward amendments that took into account the concerns of industry and the pressing need to implement the bill in a very timely fashion. It was truly a team effort. I know I speak for all members on this side of the House when I express our gratitude for the energy and ideas brought to bear on the bill. I am confident that their collective contributions and amendments have helped to clarify important elements of the bill.

Today I would like to update the House on the amendments approved by the committee.

The first amendment stems directly from a request from the Maritime Lumber Bureau. The bureau represents lumber companies throughout Atlantic Canada. As members know, the softwood lumber agreement already excludes Atlantic provinces from an export charge. This reflects a long-standing history whereby these provinces have been excluded from U.S. trade action.

Bill C-24 included provisions respecting the exclusion of the Atlantic provinces. However, the bureau wanted to ensure that this exclusion was further clarified in the bill. Therefore, led by the government and in particular the member for Cumberland—Colchester—Musquodoboit Valley, the committee discussed and passed this important amendment.

This clarification leaves no doubt that exports from the Atlantic provinces are excluded from the export charge and that a charge will only be imposed if there is a circumvention of the agreement. It also brings other exclusions, those of the territories and the included companies into the same clause. To ensure the proper functioning of the Atlantic Canada exclusion, the government will be proposing a few technical amendments to the bill at report stage.

Our colleagues from the Bloc Québécois proposed amendments that stemmed from concerns expressed by the Quebec Forest Industry Council. The first is a proposed amendment to clarify the timing with respect to the date of shipment for exports sent by rail to the U.S. Second is a proposed amendment to further clarify the definition of FOB value, which is the freight on board cargo, in the legislation. As with the Atlantic exclusions, these amendments directly address the concerns of the lumber industry.

The next amendment concerns independent remanufacturers. As the House knows, the softwood lumber agreement ensures that independent lumber remanufacturers will not have to pay an export

charge on the value added component of their products. In fact, this was an essential component of Canada's position throughout the negotiations and in direct response to industry requests. However, the industry asked for further clarity. Therefore, the bill, with the government's amendments at report stage, will make clear how the independent remanufacturer will be treated and certified.

The government also put forward a number of amendments to reflect the agreement's entry into force date of October 12, 2006.

These proposed amendments, while relatively minor in nature, will give our lumber exporters an added measure of certainty and predictability to go forward and plan for the future. Indeed, time is of the essence for the bill. Canada's lumber industry is facing a number of challenges. Lumber prices are at the low end of their cycle and production costs are rising. Combine these challenges with the continued strength of our dollar and we can begin to understand what our industry is up against.

That is why, as the amended bill makes it through the House, we should remind ourselves of the importance of moving it through in a timely manner. Our lumber companies need the stability, predictability and cash that the agreement provides.

The agreement eliminates punitive U.S. duties. It ends the costly litigation, which has gone on for far too long. Under the agreement, the U.S. will immediately dismiss all trade actions against our companies. It takes our lumber producers out of the courts and puts them back where they belong, in communities across the country, growing their enterprises and contributing to Canada's economy. It provides stability for industry hit hard by years of trade action and drawn out litigation.

For the next seven to nine years, no border measures will be imposed when lumber prices are above \$355 per thousand board feet. When prices drop below this threshold, the agreement gives provinces flexibility to choose the border measures that most benefit their economic situation. I should add that all export charge revenues collected by the Government of Canada through these border measures will stay in Canada and not end up in the U.S. treasury, which was the case before.

● (1340)

The agreement returns more than \$5 billion Canadian to companies, a significant infusion of capital for the lumber industry and the workers in more than 300 communities across Canada who depend upon it.

I am happy to report that the Export Development Canada duty refund mechanism, which we developed to expedite refunds to companies, is ahead of schedule. More than \$1.8 billion has already been dispersed to companies, and Export Development Canada will continue to make expedited refunds over the coming weeks.

Government Orders

While the money is good news in itself, we must also consider what this money represents for the forest workers and the communities. The badly needed cash provided by the agreement will help our lumber producers reinvest in their enterprises, improve efficiency and weather the current downturn in lumber prices. Most important, it will let them do so in a stable and predictable trade environment.

We cannot overestimate the importance of this kind of stable environment to our lumber industry. Along with the refunded cash, the stability and predictable environment created by the agreement will allow lumber companies to make long term plans and grow. It will also put us on the right path toward fostering further development and integration of a stronger North American lumber market, one where Canadian companies can play an essential and leading role.

Contrast this positive new environment with what life was like before the agreement. Our lumber producers have spent the better part of the last two decades engaged in a number of drawn out legal battles with the United States. They know that just because we win one battle, it does not mean we win the war.

Our victories in a number of trade courts, including NAFTA and the WTO, were simply appealed by the U.S., costing millions in legal fees and creating much uncertainty for the industry. In fact, some estimates pegged the total cost of fighting these battles for governments and individual lumber companies alike at over \$300 million since 2002. The enormity of these fees stands as a testament to the high price of continuing with the strategy built entirely around litigation.

When I hear calls to continue litigation, I remind people of the steep price of taking this path and the extremely uncertain outcome waiting at the other end. This is a case where there is simply no trade peace waiting for us. There is only continued litigation, crushing legal fees and punishing U.S. duties.

Therefore, I would ask all members to carefully consider the cost of turning our backs on this agreement. Ask the lumber companies that are getting over \$5 billion Canadian back to reinvest in their enterprises and weather the tough economic times in which they find themselves. Ask the major lumber producing provinces that join the overwhelming majority of industry in supporting the agreement. Finally, ask the hundreds of thousands of people in lumber producing provinces across the country who rely upon a stable and predictable trade environment for their livelihoods. Ask them if they would like to turn back the clocks to a time when this agreement did not exist.

The government believes our lumber communities have suffered long enough. We believe they need the stability and resources that the agreement provides. We believe the agreement is the single best way forward for our softwood lumber industry and the over 300,000 Canadians who rely upon it.

I am confident that the majority of parliamentarians agree with this assessment. Therefore, I ask for their support of the amended Bill C-24, and I thank them very much.

●(1345)

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc (Beauséjour, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, in her comments, the parliamentary secretary referred to some of the government amendments it is seeking to have accepted at report stage of Bill C-24.

By our examination, six of the seven government amendments, which deal with the Atlantic Canada exclusion, reduce or roll back some of the amendments proposed by the member for Cumberland—Colchester—Musquodoboit Valley. In her speech, the parliamentary secretary thanked him for his good work. We believe his amendments, which were supported at the committee by Conservative members, improved the position of Atlantic Canada's historic exclusion. Yet at report stage, we find the government intends to roll back what its member had proposed as an amendment, an amendment supported by the Conservatives at committee stage.

We see the same thing with respect to the definition of independence, which was included with respect to Canada's independent lumber remanufacturers. The committee included this definition in the legislation, supported by some government members. We were surprised at report stage to see the Conservatives trying to turn back the clock, or undo what we thought had been some very positive work done at committee.

Could the parliamentary secretary explain why they have changed their minds?

●(1350)

Ms. Helena Guergis: Mr. Speaker, I would remind the hon. member that he and I agreed yesterday to meet today at 11 a.m. so I could take him through those amendments to assure him that this, of course, was not the case. In fact, the member for Cumberland—Colchester—Musquodoboit Valley is in the middle of a briefing right now to take himself through those amendments to have a full understanding. He also realizes that the clarifications are very technical in nature.

However, there is one exclusion that was amended at committee. When clause 26 was actually approved by committee members, we made an error. The way the clause is worded right now, it would actually affect the industry all across the country. All the industry would be required to go through the Maritime Lumber Bureau. Unfortunately, all industry across the country just cannot go through the Maritime Lumber Bureau and provide their information to them. We do need to change that amendment so that it follows what the softwood lumber agreement has to say.

The softwood lumber agreement talks about the Maritime Lumber Bureau and it provides for the historic exclusion, which we as a government support, but the one very important part of it is that we have a domestic tax policy in Canada and we cannot have an international treaty overriding our domestic tax policy. Many times throughout the agreement there are sections where our domestic tax law applies that actually has not been put into words or even spoken about in the softwood lumber agreement.

I assure the hon. member that we are not doing anything.

Government Orders

Mr. Peter Julian (Burnaby—New Westminster, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the parliamentary secretary's efforts to vainly defend the indefensible, which is this badly botched deal and this badly flawed bill.

What is interesting, in the exchange with the Liberal member opposite, is that it is quite clear that there was even more botching in the process of drafting the amendments that were supposed to fix the first draft of botches that came in Bill C-24.

The parliamentary secretary said that Canadians needed to think about what life was like before the softwood sellout. The answer to that is very simple: the 4,000 people who had jobs then do not have them now after the signing of the agreement. In the last four weeks, 4,000 jobs have evaporated into thin air. Canadians who think about what life was like before the softwood sellout can think of the thousands of people who are no longer working and the thousands of families that have lost their breadwinner because of the appalling incompetence of the government.

The parliamentary secretary referred to some repairs that were made to this badly flawed bill, Bill C-24. We only heard two witnesses at the standing committee. A number of errors were identified. Why were other clauses, like clause 6, clause 25 and clause 18, not repaired?

Ms. Helena Guergis: Mr. Speaker, I am hearing the usual rhetoric coming from that hon. member. I find it very disappointing, especially because he continues to deliberately mislead Canadians and this House when we are talking about job losses within the softwood lumber industry.

We acknowledge that there has been some job losses but it has nothing to do with this agreement whatsoever. It definitely has everything to do with the previous Liberal government's inability to secure a deal and its inability to stand up for the softwood lumber industry and do something. In fact, it did absolutely nothing.

Mr. Ken Boshcoff (Thunder Bay—Rainy River, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, for the past number of months I have thoroughly examined and outlined the shortcomings of the softwood lumber agreement. We know for certain that it is not close to that proposed by the previous government in August, 2005.

Many of the objections to the nature of the high-handedness are now, regrettably, becoming a trademark of the minority government. The lack of consultations are also of concern. I even had Thunder Bay included on the list of sites for four nationwide hearings during the committee stages.

As to the success of our legal battles, we were winning on the NAFTA and WTO fronts. These are concerns. The fact that the major objection of the United States on subsidization was refuted is something that I outlined previously.

The concern that the \$500 million could be used against us still needs to be addressed and the impatience of the government to please the President of the United States are some of the objections that I have outlined since April. They have been well-documented and I have vocalized the concerns of the workers, the families, the communities, the municipal leaders and their associations, the suppliers and the companies.

I have also been in constant communication with all concerned. For Thunder Bay—Rainy River and, indeed, for all of northwestern Ontario, the goal is to keep people working so they can put food on the table, pay their mortgages and keep their families together.

I believe that during the debate and the vote, my message has been consistent and clear. It is to fight hard for what is best for the people of northwestern Ontario, do not let partisan politics create artificial constraints in representing one's constituents and listen to the workers and the companies that employ them. I have done all that. After six months of discussions, hearings, debate and several votes, I have strongly stood up for all concerns.

The companies in northwestern Ontario have been on their knees financially for some time and need the cashflow to keep people working. In fact, if the House will recall, it was the NDP that abandoned the workers of northwestern Ontario by supporting the Conservatives, and people know this. They know it was the NDP that cost all of these jobs. The blame lays squarely on the NDP for destroying the \$1.4 billion forestry accord.

Along with the members for Kenora and Thunder Bay—Superior North, and indeed all northern Ontario Liberal MPs and senators, we were able to establish a package of support that also gained support from MPs across the country. A combination of loan guarantees, modernization incentives and environmental cleanups were gutted by the NDP. It is clear that it has no understanding whatsoever of economics.

One of the most despicable, even by NDP standards, public relations stunts recently took place. Inviting members to a debate without the decency of first talking to the members to see if they were available hit a new low. If people thought this was the hallmark of NDP character assassination techniques, one can just imagine its fear in not being able to even send a direct invitation. Many members of the NDP's own caucus and more in the labour movement were embarrassed by this deliberate setup. It was a new low for them.

All members of the House deal with the debate in an honourable parliamentary manner. That the members for Timmins—James Bay and Burnaby—New Westminster would stoop to this subterranean level has revealed their lack of character.

Over my 30 year span in elected office, I have never once seen such action. My record of public accountability and accessibility as president of three major municipal organizations, as mayor, councillor and now as representative of the people of Thunder Bay—Rainy River, speaks loudly and clearly of someone who is known to be fair, reasonable and honourable. Would I ever pull such a stunt like that? Never. It is astonishing that the NDP does not even have enough class to apologize. It is very sad and very lame.

As the first round of cheques have now been deposited and the companies have, with great reluctance, accepted this deal, it is vital that any obstruction or posturing that would delay the flow of further funds would only hurt the workers.

I ask all members to please let us move forward and cease any needless obstruction. If we are doing it for its own sake, then that is not the gesture of this Parliament.

Statements by Members

●(1355)

The reason I voted in favour of this agreement, after many months of outlining my objections, was to restore economic vitality. Employees have been calling my office and dropping in to thank me and for that I am very appreciative. When a worker has been laid off and is now working again it means the entire difference. If the people of northwestern Ontario are working it means that northwestern Ontario is also working.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): I hate to interrupt the hon. member for Thunder Bay—Rainy River but it being 2 o'clock, we must move on. He will have five minutes left the next time this bill is debated.

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

[English]

CADETS

Mr. Rick Norlock (Northumberland—Quinte West, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is with great pride and pleasure that I rise today to pay tribute to special young men and women who are part of the many cadet organizations throughout my riding.

For many years, Canada's young people have been involved in sea, air and army cadets. The cadet program challenges our youth to be the best they can be through team work and discipline, and yes, some fun too.

Recently one young man from my riding set himself apart from his peers by receiving a special award. Cadet Warrant Officer First Class James Powell of the 598 Sabre Air Cadet Squadron received his wings as he completed his private pilot's licence. He also was a recipient of the Doug Whitley Award for top cadet.

Recently many cadets took part in thousands of Remembrance Day services across this great country.

I extend congratulations to all the young men and women who dedicate their personal time to getting involved with cadets, to those volunteers who guide them and to the communities that provide so much support.

* * *

●(1400)

BOYS AND GIRLS CLUBS

Hon. Navdeep Bains (Mississauga—Brampton South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to recognize the important work of the Boys and Girls Club of Peel. Their after school program enhances the skills and knowledge that children receive in a formal classroom setting.

I believe that after school programs in my riding of Mississauga—Brampton South and across Canada have a positive impact on our children's study habits, self-esteem and the ability to work with each other.

The benefit that the Boys and Girls Club of Peel brings to our community has been recognized by various foundations. Recently,

the RBC Foundation awarded the club a \$28,000 grant to support its efforts.

Last week I attended the club's after school visual arts competition and was very pleased at the results that such programs have in developing community spirit. That is why I will continue to urge community leaders and businesses to assist these worthwhile initiatives.

I hope the House will join with me in recognizing the Boys and Girls Club of Peel by thanking everyone for their great work and their contribution to our community.

* * *

[Translation]

GOVERNMENT POLICIES

Ms. Christiane Gagnon (Québec, BQ): Mr. Speaker, not satisfied with being a laughingstock at the World AIDS Conference, the Conservative government showed, yet again, its lack of compassion at the first nations socio-economic forum in Mash-teuiatsh in October.

The empty chair policy seems to be coming all too common with this government. In August, the Prime Minister did not attend the World AIDS Conference and then it was the Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development's turn to leave the Mash-teuiatsh forum before the issue of social housing was ever discussed.

Lack of housing and a shortage of clean drinking water are third world problems that many first nations communities in Quebec are still experiencing.

I want to remind this government that it still has not announced anything about housing for aboriginals living on reserve, nor any concrete measures to halt the spread of the AIDS virus. The Bloc Québécois interprets this government's indifference as a blatant lack of compassion toward aboriginals and AIDS sufferers.

* * *

[English]

SOFTWOOD LUMBER

Mr. Peter Julian (Burnaby—New Westminster, NDP): Mr. Speaker, in yet another reaction to the softwood lumber sellout, Western Forest Products, which employed nearly 300 people, is closing its Queensborough mill in New Westminster, B.C. The closing of the mill, which has been in operation since 1914, deals a devastating blow to another softwood community.

With the help of the Liberal Party, the government and its intellectually malnourished Minister of International Trade are ramming down the throats of Canadians a badly negotiated, poorly drafted and punitive softwood agreement. The sellout promotes raw log exports to the U.S. rather than jobs in Canada.

We saw 2,500 jobs lost in just one week after the accord was signed and there have been 4,000 in the last month. As a result of the softwood sellout, we have seen jobs lost across British Columbia, in Alberta, in Saskatchewan and Manitoba, and in northern Ontario and Quebec.

Not one Conservative has spoken out against this. Only one political party is fighting this sellout and the giveaway of Canadian jobs and over \$1 billion. Only the NDP is standing up for Canada and Canadian softwood jobs.

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TOURISM

Mr. Bruce Stanton (Simcoe North, CPC): Mr. Speaker, today we have representatives of the tourism industry here on Parliament Hill meeting with members of all political parties. As someone who has earned a living in this industry, I can certainly vouch for the importance of their message. Tourism accounts for 2.1% of our GDP. It employs 1.6 million Canadians, about 10% of our national workforce.

About 80% of tourism businesses are small and medium size enterprises. I am sure every member of the House knows of a lodging business, a transport company, or a natural and cultural or historical attraction bringing many visitors to their riding.

Canada is part of a global tourism industry, with new and exciting destinations coming online each year. That is why it is important to maintain and hopefully grow Canada's share of the tourism trade, just like Canada's other important export industries.

I ask all hon. members to join me in welcoming the women and men who showcase this beautiful country the world over, Canada's tourism industry.

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• (1405)

GOVERNMENT POLICIES

Hon. Raymond Chan (Richmond, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, my constituents in Richmond have many questions for this incapable, untrustworthy, meanspirited, neo-conservative government.

Why did the Conservatives break their promises to Canadians by giving up \$1 billion in the softwood lumber agreement to our American competitors; by not conducting a review on the leaky condo crisis in B.C.; by proposing an accountability act that will make the government less accountable; by allowing so many Conservatives to go through the revolving doors to become lobbyists; and by lying about the taxation of income trusts and costing Canadians \$25 billion in two days?

Particularly, why are they so meanspirited as to cut a billion dollars' worth of social programs when they inherited a \$13 billion surplus from the Liberal government?

Last, why are they now attacking the independence of Canada's judiciary?

* * *

CARDIOVASCULAR HEALTH

Mr. Rob Merrifield (Yellowhead, CPC): Mr. Speaker, getting a regular health assessment plays an important role in disease prevention.

Today the Canadian Medical Association is hosting a cardiovascular risk assessment booth, where members of Parliament and their

Statements by Members

staff can chart their 10 year risk of cardiovascular disease. They can also discover their cardiovascular age, calculate their body mass index, and find out their cholesterol level.

I know that due to our busy schedules members of Parliament sometimes neglect their own health, but knowledge is the key to health and our future health is largely determined by taking such preventive action and getting regular health assessments.

The cardiovascular risk assessment booth will be open from 8 a.m. to 12 noon and again from 1:30 p.m. to 4:30 p.m. today in room 200, West Block. The examination is very quick and results are available in 10 minutes. I encourage all members of Parliament and their staff to take the time to get an assessment. An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure.

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[Translation]

ABORIGINALS AFFAIRS

Mr. Marc Lemay (Abitibi—Témiscamingue, BQ): Mr. Speaker, today is the 10th anniversary of the tabling of the report by the Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, the Erasmus-Dussault report.

It has been a decade already since important recommendations to establish a justice-based relationship between aboriginals and non-aboriginals were made public. Unfortunately, since then they have been set aside by the successive governments here in Ottawa.

It took five years of work and consultations to produce a report of more than 4,000 pages with 400 recommendations. The report proposed a 20-year program of concrete solutions to problems that are difficult to solve.

The Bloc Québécois strongly believes that aboriginals have to be able to function again as a nation. I call on the government to show some respect for the first nations by going back to the Erasmus-Dussault report and implementing its key recommendations.

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[English]

PREVENTION OF GENOCIDE

Mr. Harold Albrecht (Kitchener—Conestoga, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour of introducing an All Party Parliamentary Group for the Prevention of Genocide and other Crimes Against Humanity.

Unfortunately, this issue continues to plague mankind even today.

I am proud to serve on the interim executive of the group. The group aims to bring information to parliamentarians of all political parties and provide an opportunity to discuss ways of preventing these horrors from occurring.

I urge all members of the House to attend a special reception tonight in the parliamentary restaurant, where they can meet Mr. Juan Mendez. Mr. Mendez is the United Nations Special Adviser on the Prevention of Genocide. We are honoured to have him join us today.

Statements by Members

Crimes against humanity do not recognize partisanship. I would urge members of all parties to attend tonight, meet Mr. Mendez and learn more about what role they can play.

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GOVERNMENT POLICIES

Mr. Michael Savage (Dartmouth—Cole Harbour, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we can say two things about the recent Conservative cuts to programs. First, they are dumb, and second, they are mean, particularly the cuts to the summer career placement program, an initiative that has employed hundreds of thousands of students and has provided huge benefits to organizations working toward the betterment of our communities.

In my community, these grants support child care centres, boys and girls clubs and youth recreation and help charities, seniors and other groups. Every one of those groups is a non-profit organization.

The government's announcement of cuts to this program is indefensible. No one has been given a coherent explanation for why the federal government, awash in money, would make these cuts.

Any cut to student employment is very troubling. I spend a lot of time with student leaders at our universities and colleges and with not for profit organizations trying to build a better Canada. At a time of increased tuition, a summer job is critical to making it to university and college. These unnecessary cuts mean that students will miss out on the opportunity to attend college or university and they also will hurt communities.

These cuts are a lose-lose proposition. They are ill conceived and damaging, both to students and our communities, and they must be reversed.

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• (1410)

[*Translation*]

DONALD VÉZINA

Mr. Steven Blaney (Lévis—Bellechasse, CPC): Mr. Speaker, during a large and moving family celebration in Saint-Michel-de-Bellechasse on November 11, I had the honour of awarding the Canadian Peacekeeping Service Medal to Donald Vézina.

Donald Vézina worked on a United Nations peacekeeping mission as a member of the 22nd Regiment. Mr. Vézina completed two tours of duty in Cyprus during Canada's 29-year mission, leaving behind his wife and children. He is the son of Léo-Dominique Vézina, a World War II aviator in the 425 Tactical Fighter Squadron, "Les Alouettes", who gave his life for our country.

That same day, his sister, Sylvie, launched a book entitled *Le dernier vol de l'Alouette* in memory of their father. She was very young when her father died, and she retraced the epic story of this true Canadian hero by collecting stories from members of his family and consulting the National Archives of Canada.

Today, I would like to applaud the courage of the great Vézina family of Bellechasse that showed solidarity in the face of Canada's greatest military and humanitarian challenges and that reminds us

that people from close to home gave their lives to protect our freedoms and our rights.

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[*English*]

MUSICAL CRAFTSMANSHIP

Mr. Tony Martin (Sault Ste. Marie, NDP): Mr. Speaker, Raymond Schryer of Sault Ste. Marie is a fine fiddle player and an internationally acclaimed violin maker.

Raymond has just returned from the biennial instrument making competition in Baltimore for the Violin Society of America, where he won two silver medals for violin and viola. He received the highest marks given for workmanship, competing with over 300 violins and viola entered from around the globe.

Raymond is passionate about violins and has turned his love for music into making some of the finest musical instruments in the world. The dream of designing his own workshop became a reality for Raymond when he renovated the town hall in Hilton Beach and subsequently a heritage building on the St. Mary's River in Sault Ste. Marie.

He has become a leader in his field, having been recognized with international gold medal wins. The pinnacle of his career to date is the gold medal win for cello in October 2003 in Italy.

I ask the House today to salute Raymond as a recognized leader and innovator in his field.

* * *

PREVENTION OF GENOCIDE

Hon. Keith Martin (Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to notify this House of the formation of an All Party Coalition for the Prevention of Genocide, composed of members from all parties and both Houses.

Its intent is to provide information to the House on existing and developing humanitarian catastrophes. To help inaugurate this, we have Juan Mendez, the special adviser to the Secretary-General of the UN, here in Ottawa today.

The necessity for this group is the fact that the world has not learned the hard lessons from Rwanda and the Holocaust. Today the carnage in Darfur continues in unimaginable ways. In eastern Congo, 20,000 people a month are dying of preventable causes. In northern Uganda, the Acholi people have been herded, and they are being asphyxiated of their basic needs.

Catastrophes are occurring. The Prime Minister said he would not allow these catastrophes to occur on his watch. We ask the Prime Minister to act now, act quickly and save lives.

Oral Questions

[Translation]

PIERRE GEMAYEL

Mrs. Maria Mourani (Ahuntsic, BQ): Mr. Speaker, we recently learned of the assassination of Lebanese cabinet minister Pierre Gemayel. The son of Amin Gemayel—former Lebanese president—and the nephew of Bashir Gemayel, who was also assassinated, Pierre Gemayel was elected in 2000 and again in 2005. He became Minister of Industry in July 2005.

Pierre Gemayel participated in the Cedar Revolution following the assassination of Rafik Hariri. Since then he and other Lebanese parliamentarians have fought fiercely for their country's sovereignty.

The Bloc Québécois condemns this terrible act and urges the Canadian government to support Lebanese authorities in advancing the Lebanese national dialogue.

This assassination is another assault on Lebanon's fragile peace and democracy.

The Bloc Québécois offers its condolences to the Lebanese community, the Phalange party and the Lebanese diaspora. He will be missed.

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[English]

GEORGE BLACKBURN

Mr. Pierre Poilievre (Nepean—Carleton, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise today, humbled, saddened and honoured, to speak of George Blackburn, a retired World War II veteran, artillery officer, Military Cross winner, dedicated public servant, reporter, author, director, and loving husband, father, grandfather and even great-grandfather. This great Canadian passed away peacefully in his 90th year last week right here in Ottawa.

Mr. Blackburn was born in the town of Wales, Ontario, a village cleared to make way for the St. Lawrence Seaway. The project was commemorated in one of his musical plays, *A Day to Remember*.

He was best known publicly for his World War II book trilogy, *The Guns of Normandy*, which brought him the 1996 *Ottawa Citizen* Book of the Year Award.

He will be remembered. We extend to him all the honour of this House. May God bless his soul.

ORAL QUESTIONS

• (1415)

[English]

FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Hon. Bill Graham (Leader of the Opposition, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, 18 years ago, you and other members were elected to the House of Commons. We congratulate you and we congratulate our colleagues of that class. I myself missed that class by 60 votes. It was a little bit like one of your privilege motions, Mr. Speaker; we never know which way it is going to go until it is too late. We are glad that

you are here and we congratulate you and the other members of the House.

Mr. Speaker, when the Prime Minister travels the world on our behalf, Canadians have the right to know what is going on. Citizens have the right to be informed by a free press, but the Prime Minister tries to manipulate the press. On his trip to Asia he deliberately kept the press in the dark unless it suited his purposes. He refused to tell the press about meetings and actions.

How can the Prime Minister be so boastful about lecturing China and the world on human rights when he plays games with the right of Canadian citizens to be fully informed by our free press?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, let me share my congratulations as well with you on the 18th anniversary of your election. I was also unsuccessful in that particular election; I am glad we find something we can agree on.

Of course when I travelled there were various formal meetings that I had. There were photo ops before those formal meetings, meetings with the press before those. I gave a press conference at the end of the meetings and of course I also informed the press about any informal meetings that took place.

Hon. Bill Graham (Leader of the Opposition, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I congratulate the Prime Minister on his photo op. He was spectacular in that gown he was wearing.

The Prime Minister's mania for secrecy and control is undermining our country's conduct of international affairs. It is not just the press the Prime Minister tries to keep in the dark. It is his own Minister of Foreign Affairs who said yesterday that the Prime Minister received a promise from China that Mr. Celil would not be executed, but later the minister was contradicted by his own staff. Any commitment was given seven months ago by Uzbekistan.

Why is the Prime Minister seeking to keep his own foreign affairs minister as much out of the loop as he tries to keep our citizens and the press? What exactly did the Prime Minister achieve for Mr. Celil and Canadians?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I think the Minister of Foreign Affairs has addressed the assurances that we have been given by the government of China. The position of this party and this government, which is certainly different from the last one, is that when we deal with countries around the world, and important countries like China, not only do we pursue our own economic and trade interests, but we also pursue human rights and the democracy agenda, particularly where the interests of Canadian citizens are affected. We will not back down on that.

I can add in terms of photo ops that there is a tradition at APEC to do pictures in traditional garb. Unlike the Leader of the Opposition, I had to wear the silk on the outside.

Hon. Bill Graham (Leader of the Opposition, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I can assure the Prime Minister that I have just as many embarrassing pictures of myself as they do on that side.

Oral Questions

●(1420)

[Translation]

Everyone agrees. This government gave a pitiful performance in Asia. It confused Canadians. It contradicted itself. All because this Prime Minister is trying to manipulate the press.

I have specific, clear questions that I want the Prime Minister to answer for this House. Where is Mr. Celil being held? What are the charges against him? Has the Prime Minister received additional assurances as to Mr. Celil's safety and when Mr. Celil will be coming back to Canada?

Canadians do not need tall tales from the Prime Minister, they want answers—

The Speaker: The right hon. Prime Minister.

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I will say again that we do not discuss individual cases in the House of Commons.

When I travel and meet with leaders of other countries, I discuss not only major economic issues, but also important human rights issues. This is completely different from the Liberal Party, which denied a motion in the House of Commons to express our concern about human rights in China.

[English]

Also I can say in regard to my well-known agenda to control the press, I will work closely with the Leader of the Opposition to keep those photos of him out of the media.

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*[Translation]***THE ENVIRONMENT**

Hon. Lucienne Robillard (Westmount—Ville-Marie, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Minister of the Environment is following her Prime Minister's example. When she travels abroad, she also does not recognize that Canadians have the right to be informed by a free, democratic press.

In Nairobi, the minister was the only spokesperson authorized to speak to the media, but she consistently refused requests for interviews.

Why is the Minister of the Environment intentionally avoiding the media? Has the Prime Minister ordered her to do so? What does she have to hide from Canadians?

[English]

Hon. Rona Ambrose (Minister of the Environment, CPC): Mr. Speaker, let me clear. I did many, many interviews both by phone and in person and held a number of scrums. My job there was to engage in important bilateral meetings with other countries and I held several of those. I also, as the minister, was involved in intensive negotiations with a number of other ministers on key issues to make sure that we could secure a good agreement for Canada so that we could actually agree with the international community, reach a consensus and be able to tell Canadians that we could come back supporting the agreement that we did reach.

[Translation]

Hon. Lucienne Robillard (Westmount—Ville-Marie, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the government has abandoned Kyoto, despite what the Minister of the Environment says.

We now have e-mails confirming that Conservative ministers have ordered officials to remove all reference to Kyoto from government websites and to dismantle the climate change site.

How can the minister parade around Canada and abroad saying that she supports Kyoto? Does she really think Canadians will take her seriously?

[English]

Hon. Rona Ambrose (Minister of the Environment, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I encourage the member to look on the Environment Canada website. She will find a link to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change as well as a link directly to the Kyoto protocol. Again, our job is to negotiate a good framework for Canada, which is what we were able to do. We secured increased accountability on the international programs we were concerned about.

We also secured a complete review of the Kyoto protocol which was something our government wanted. We also led the negotiations to include other countries and to force other countries to consider taking on new targets, which is something our government has always said is necessary so that we can actually have a real, effective international agreement.

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*[Translation]***TAXATION**

Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, in the last budget, in a section called “Restoring Fiscal Balance in Canada”, the government declared it would go ahead with proposals aimed at correcting the fiscal imbalance by fall. Yet it is now almost winter and the government has not made any proposals or moved this matter forward in any way.

Will the Prime Minister take the opportunity of the November 23 economic statement to announce concrete measures to correct the fiscal imbalance?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in the last budget, this government increased transfer payments to the provinces and we will take further action in the next budget.

Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I thought I was listening to the previous prime minister, who used to say the same thing. The leader of the opposition at the time, who is now Prime Minister, criticized responses like the one he just gave me.

He promised Quebec he would correct the fiscal imbalance, knowing very well that there were differences between the provinces. He did not say, “If there is consensus, I will agree”. That is easy. He has some decisions to make.

I ask him this: Will he announce concrete measures, and by that I mean to the tune of \$3.9 billion, in the economic statement?

•(1425)

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, regarding the sum mentioned by the leader of the Bloc Québécois, I would like to quote Robert Gagné, co-chair of the Council of the Federation Advisory Panel on the Fiscal Imbalance, who said, “The statements made by Mr. Boisclair and the leader of the Bloc Québécois do not result from a different interpretation of our conclusions but rather from a more than dubious manipulation of certain data in our report. By manipulating the data in our report in this way, Mr. Boisclair and the leader of the Bloc Québécois are misleading the public and trying to foster unrealistic expectations that have no basis in fact”.

Mr. Pierre Paquette (Joliette, BQ): Mr. Speaker, if anyone is manipulating, it is people like the Prime Minister; he does not want to keep his promise, because he was very well aware of the extent of the fiscal imbalance when he made the formal commitment in Quebec City, in the middle of the election campaign, to solve it once and for all.

Now that he has a substantial surplus and our proposals that some order be restored to the federal government have secured him an additional \$15 billion over three years manoeuvring room, what is the Prime Minister waiting for, to honour his commitment to Quebec and put the \$3.9 billion per year that is needed into solving the fiscal imbalance?

Hon. Lawrence Cannon (Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we have to remember that the Bloc Québécois soap opera is still going on. It was discredited earlier by an economist, and then by the Quebec Minister of Finance, and it had to appeal to its big brother again, Jacques Léonard, who, it will be recalled, was incapable of controlling expenditures in Quebec.

Who is telling the truth?

Mr. Pierre Paquette (Joliette, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Minister should know that on April 12 of this year, in the National Assembly, the Quebec Minister of Finance, Mr. Audet, asked for \$3.8 billion, which is a figure in the same ballpark as what the Bloc Québécois is asking for.

I have provided the Minister of Finance with the recommendations by the Bloc Québécois regarding the improvements that need to be made to management in the federal government. As I said earlier, those improvements would save him \$15 billion over three years.

Given these facts, how could the Minister of Finance say that he does not have the resources to honour the promise his Prime Minister made to Quebecers?

Hon. Lawrence Cannon (Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, CPC): Mr. Speaker, because of all this confusion, we are starting to wish that the member for Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot, who was the finance critic, were still with us. What we are seeing here once again is the dithering practised by the Bloc Québécois, which is incapable of deciding on a figure.

Last weekend we heard Mr. Léonard talking about \$15.9 billion, and the member has just told us \$15 billion.

Oral Questions

Once again, who is telling the truth? Are they going to provide us with these conditions? Are they going to provide us with this information?

* * *

[English]

AFGHANISTAN

Hon. Jack Layton (Toronto—Danforth, NDP): Mr. Speaker, there is more very serious evidence today that our mission in Afghanistan is seriously off track, that we are on the wrong track for the country. We learned today that our elite soldiers, part of the joint task force, are abandoning the Canadian Forces and taking on lucrative mercenary contracts in Iraq. At the same time, we learned from our commanders that they are having to call up more and more reservists to backfill for the inadequate preparations that were made to accommodate our obligations in Afghanistan.

When will the Prime Minister finally realize that this Liberal-Conservative mission in Afghanistan is on the wrong track and is the wrong mission for Canada?

Hon. Gordon O'Connor (Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the mission in Afghanistan is on the right track.

We also have no problem recruiting people for our special forces, contrary to what the member is alleging. When we took over, the armed forces had been dramatically reduced; the training system was in great difficulty. What we are doing now is we are being innovative. We are using community colleges, we are using training institutions, we are using retired military to help train in the skills of the military, but everybody who is trained by these means must be fully qualified before they are accepted and tested.

•(1430)

Hon. Jack Layton (Toronto—Danforth, NDP): Mr. Speaker, all this shows that we were completely unprepared as a country to be involved in this mission. In fact that is what our commanders advised the Liberals when they were contemplating this idea in the first place. Our generals told us that they wanted nothing to do with this mission at the time.

What we see now is a scrambling by the government to try to salvage a mission that was wrong-headed in the first place. At the same time, we have experts telling us that we are losing the battle for the hearts and minds of the Afghan people as well as our international reputation.

When is the Prime Minister going to realize that we are on the wrong track and rethink it, get us onto a—

The Speaker: The right hon. the Prime Minister.

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I can assure the hon. member that the leadership of the military and the men and women in uniform are fully committed to their jobs and to this mission.

What I wonder is when the NDP will realize it is on the wrong track in opposing a mandate of the United Nations, when it is on the wrong track in being against the democratically elected government of Afghanistan, and when it is on the wrong track in not backing our men and women in uniform.

*Oral Questions***HEALTH**

Ms. Ruby Dhalla (Brampton—Springdale, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the minority Conservative government has failed Canadians on reducing health care wait times.

A report today on cancer patients shows how they are taking out loans, racking up financial debt and worrying about financial ruin, all in an effort to pay for their treatment that they so desperately need. The Conservatives promised to reduce wait times for cancer patients, but instead, these patients are waiting longer than ever.

Will the minister explain why he has shown no action on health care, has not taken any action to reduce wait times? Why did the Conservatives make cancer patients a promise that they knew they would not keep?

Hon. Tony Clement (Minister of Health and Minister for the Federal Economic Development Initiative for Northern Ontario, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in fact, just yesterday I announced Canada's first wait time guarantee for prenatal care among first nations where we need to get better care for moms and kids. That means the government is taking leadership which that party, when it was in power, did not do.

Under her party in government, wait times in this country doubled from, to be precise, 9.3 weeks in 1993 to 17.8 weeks in 2003. That is her party's record. Our government has a record of action and we will pursue that initiative.

Ms. Ruby Dhalla (Brampton—Springdale, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, we on this side of the House are proud of our record on health care because we delivered results.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order, please. The hon. member for Brampton—Springdale has the floor to put a question.

Ms. Ruby Dhalla: Mr. Speaker, the minister does not seem to realize that this initiative is a drop in the bucket. It actually represents a step backward because with the Kelowna accord, under the Liberal government, we invested \$1.3 billion for aboriginal health.

Canadians were promised action and leadership, and now Canadians have been told to take a number while the minister figures out his action plan. It has been almost a year. The delivery is long overdue. Canadians are tired of waiting. They want a prescription for the wait time guarantee—

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of Health.

Hon. Tony Clement (Minister of Health and Minister for the Federal Economic Development Initiative for Northern Ontario, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have to inform the hon. member that the whole purpose of wait times is not to double them but to reduce them. The hon. member has nothing to be proud of in terms of her government's record.

Our government is acting. Our government announced the first wait time guarantee in the country. We took leadership in our own sphere of competency. We are helping those most vulnerable, moms and kids on first nations reserves. That is the way to start. We have gone one step further than the Liberals ever went and we are proud of it.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Bernard Patry (Pierrefonds—Dollard, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Conservatives promised to establish a policy on wait times for health care. Well, 10 months later, we are still waiting.

The commitment to reduce wait times is no longer among the five little priorities of the government. They have simply crossed it off the list, hoping that Canadians would forget it.

We learned today that wait times for cancer treatment are increasing dramatically.

Will the Minister of Health admit that his promise was nothing but empty words and that he had no intention of implementing a real policy for reducing wait times for cancer treatment?

• (1435)

Hon. Tony Clement (Minister of Health and Minister for the Federal Economic Development Initiative for Northern Ontario, CPC): Mr. Speaker, yesterday I announced an action plan directed to First Nations living on reserves. For the first time, it deals with a wait time guarantee in Canada. That is action.

The Liberal government had made promises, but no action had been taken to reduce wait times. Our government is a government of action and we have acted for the good of Canadians concerning wait times. We are—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Pierrefonds—Dollard.

Mr. Bernard Patry (Pierrefonds—Dollard, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am very happy to hear the minister himself say that he has no action plan.

The Conservatives have been in power for almost a year and they must take the blame alone. In fact, the only thing they can boast about in terms of health care is that they inherited our plan. Yes, we had signed a 10-year plan to improve health care. We had invested more than \$41 billion in that plan, of which \$5.5 billion was directed at reducing wait times in cooperation with the provinces and territories.

Why is there this delay? The plan is in place, the money is available and the report by Dr. Postl speaks for itself. Is the minister insensitive to the concerns of Canadians?

Hon. Tony Clement (Minister of Health and Minister for the Federal Economic Development Initiative for Northern Ontario, CPC): Mr. Speaker, that is not it at all. It is important to act and to show leadership, but we must act with the provinces and territories toward a national action plan.

Of course, it is also our plan, but the previous Liberal government did not have an action plan. That is nothing but rhetoric, there is no plan. Now, Canada does have a plan and we are proud of the wait times for all Canadians.

THE ENVIRONMENT

Mr. Bernard Bigras (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, in spite of the federal government's objections, the Nairobi summit gave the international community the opportunity to find out that Quebec can reach the Kyoto protocol targets and that the Quebec government has a plan to do just that.

Given that the federal government collects and manages a significant portion of the taxes paid by Quebeckers, how can it refuse to pay its share and make Quebeckers take on the full cost of reducing greenhouse gas emissions in their province?

Hon. Rona Ambrose (Minister of the Environment, CPC): Mr. Speaker, here are the facts: Canada alone signed the Kyoto protocol. Quebec and the other provinces do not have targets under the protocol. There are 11 national targets for the whole country, and all of the provinces are welcome to work with our government to reach the Kyoto protocol targets.

Mr. Bernard Bigras (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the only specific target the federal government has set for achieving its greenhouse gas emissions reduction objectives is the year 2050.

That being the case, are we to understand that during future meetings of Kyoto protocol signatories, Canada will continue to weasel out of its responsibility by putting off greenhouse gas emissions reduction indefinitely so it can avoid meeting any specific, absolute, short-term goals?

[English]

Hon. Rona Ambrose (Minister of the Environment, CPC): In fact, Mr. Speaker, that is incorrect. It is false. Our government is working right now to establish short term targets so that we can actually make progress toward our international obligations beyond 2012.

One of the big topics of discussion in Nairobi was encouraging all countries that have targets to take on a target for mid-century, by 2050. Luckily, I was able to inform the international community that Canada has already done that.

* * *

[Translation]

FOREIGN AFFAIRS

Ms. Caroline St-Hilaire (Longueuil—Pierre-Boucher, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Palestinian population is already in a hopeless situation that became even worse with the election of Hamas, since humanitarian aid is no longer arriving at its intended destination.

Could the Prime Minister not promote an international conference that would begin implementing a structure to allow humanitarian aid to get to the Palestinian people?

[English]

Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of Foreign Affairs and Minister of the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency, CPC): Mr. Speaker, obviously, we remain concerned about the plight of the Palestinian people, as we do of any outbreak of violence in the region. Canada is working with its international partners, all bodies, all forums, including the United Nations, to look for creative

Oral Questions

solutions to this troubling and ongoing problem that has been in the Middle East and plagued the people of that region for so many years.

[Translation]

Ms. Caroline St-Hilaire (Longueuil—Pierre-Boucher, BQ): Mr. Speaker, as chair of the Middle East Refugee Working Group, Canada is in a privileged position to propose solutions to the humanitarian crisis in Palestinian territory.

If the European Union was able to set up a temporary process to get humanitarian aid to Palestine without going through Hamas, what is stopping Canada from using its privileged position to do the same?

• (1440)

Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of Foreign Affairs and Minister of the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the reality is that the government is still looking for a way to get aid directly to the Palestinian people. I am still working with the other foreign affairs ministers in order to find a way to help the people in that region. I appreciate the cooperation of the hon. members and all their suggestions in order to help this cause.

* * *

[English]

JUSTICE

Mr. Brian Murphy (Moncton—Riverview—Dieppe, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, first the justice minister wanted to jail 10-year-olds and eliminate judicial discretion for sentencing. Now he wants to radically alter judicial advisory committees and give his hand-picked appointees an effective veto. The minister already has the power to appoint members to this committee, any one of whom could be a police representative.

Will the minister admit that he did not consult with any stakeholders before making his announcement because he knew his proposal would be opposed by almost every stakeholder he would have asked?

Hon. Vic Toews (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, CPC): Mr. Speaker, first of all, the member is wrong with respect to the issue of 10-year-olds. I have never said such a thing and he should stop putting falsehoods on the record. He knows that is false.

Second, the member has consistently spoken out against the police and victims in favour of the criminal defence bar. Our party stands with the victims of Canada. We stand with the police officers. Police have a right to be heard in this country and they will perform a valuable role in accordance with the committee recommendations that were made earlier.

[Translation]

Mr. Brian Murphy (Moncton—Riverview—Dieppe, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, in a letter addressed to *La Presse*, the Minister of Justice said he wants to appoint police officers to the judicial appointment committee in order to represent the victims' point of view.

Why is the Minister of Public Safety refusing the request by the victims of the Dawson College shooting to maintain the gun registry? Does this government only listen to victims who think the same way it does?

Oral Questions

Hon. Stockwell Day (Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I met with one of the victims, Mr. Kadhim, who was injured in the tragedy. I also met with the mother of the young woman who was killed, as well as with teachers from Dawson College.

I can tell you that they have good ideas. I hope to be able to use those ideas as we head toward having a stronger registry.

[*English*]

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Wascana, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the vast majority of Canadians cherish our charter of rights as a fundamental characteristic of a diverse, inclusive and welcoming society. But the Prime Minister sees the charter as only an impeding standing in the way of his extreme ideology, his intolerance, and his republican social engineering.

During the election the Prime Minister said not to worry, the courts will hold his extremism in check. The government's political meddling with the courts and its assault on judicial integrity is all a concerted plan to limit the independence of judges and undermine the charter. Why?

Hon. Vic Toews (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, CPC): Mr. Speaker, is it not interesting that the member for Vancouver Quadra, the critic for democratic reform in fact agrees that police officers should be on those committees? Perhaps it is the member from Regina who is so badly out of touch with Canadians. Why does he not support police? Why does he not support victims? Why is he consistently against the rights of victims? Why does he not want to see a balanced committee and a balanced justice system?

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Wascana, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, let us talk about balance. First we had the outrageous Conservative member for Saskatoon—Wanuskeewin directly insulting the chief justice and there was no rebuke from the Prime Minister.

The Conservatives then cancelled the court challenges program. They strangled the Law Reform Commission. They politicized judicial nominations. They systematically ignore the advice of the Canadian Bar Association. They demean the Supreme Court. Their own government lawyers will not certify Conservative legislation as constitutional.

When will the minister stop learning his law from trailer park boys and stand up for the charter of rights and an independent judiciary?

• (1445)

Hon. Vic Toews (Minister of Justice and Attorney General of Canada, CPC): Mr. Speaker, when will the member understand that the police play an important role in the justice system? Why does he want to see them sidelined? Why does he think that victims have no voice in this system? Why does he want to see judicial advisory committees kept as a secret cabal?

The member for Scarborough—Guildwood said that we apparently have judge made law in this country and we are just here for decoration. We do not agree with that, but that is what his own party's members are saying.

* * *

ABORIGINAL AFFAIRS

Mr. Ron Cannan (Kelowna—Lake Country, CPC): Mr. Speaker, today we are celebrating the 10th anniversary of the Royal

Commission on Aboriginal Peoples. The Assembly of First Nations has issued a report card on the former Liberal government's performance in relation to the RCAP report.

Can the Minister of Indian Affairs share with the House his comments on the Liberal Party's failing grade, a capital F?

Hon. Jim Prentice (Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development and Federal Interlocutor for Métis and Non-Status Indians, CPC): Mr. Speaker, on this the 10th anniversary of the royal commission I am pleased to announce that the new Government of Canada is making progress in improving the lives of aboriginal Canadians, unlike the former government.

Frankly, I agree with the AFN, the Auditor General, and virtually every other independent commentator who has remarked on the terrible Liberal grade of F for its failure and disgraceful, shameful abandonment of aboriginal Canadians. Aboriginal Canadians now know they have a government that delivers. No more ducking, dodging, dithering or delaying.

* * *

HEALTH

Ms. Penny Priddy (Surrey North, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the pharmaceutical policy of the federal government is driving up drug costs. The provinces, territories, employers and ordinary Canadians are left to pay the bills. Currently, the federal government only pays for approximately 2% of drug expenditures and 3.5 million Canadians are without any coverage if they find themselves in need of catastrophic drug coverage.

It is time to heed the call of Roy Romanow and create a national pharmaceutical plan. When is the minister going to get started?

Hon. Tony Clement (Minister of Health and Minister for the Federal Economic Development Initiative for Northern Ontario, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would be happy to address this issue. As a result of the 2004 health accord, there was and continues to be work done by the provinces and territories, along with the federal government, on what is called a national pharmaceutical strategy.

Part of conversation is the topic mentioned by the hon. member. There are literally eight or nine other topics of conversation. I look forward to continuing that conversation with my colleagues at the next federal-provincial-territorial meeting.

Ms. Penny Priddy (Surrey North, NDP): Mr. Speaker, in Canada we spend 17% of health care money on prescription drugs and only 13% on doctors. Simple economics tells us that when medication is bought in bulk, it will cost less for working Canadians. Logic tells us when drug patents are limited to reasonable duration, medication becomes cheaper. No one waiting for cancer should be forced into poverty.

Oral Questions

Why will the minister not implement the simple and logical solution, a catastrophic drug program? It is affordable, it is efficient and it strengthens our health system.

Hon. Tony Clement (Minister of Health and Minister for the Federal Economic Development Initiative for Northern Ontario, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I remind the hon. member, on behalf of the Minister of Finance, that as a result of budget 2006, this federal government has increased its transfers to provinces and territories by \$1.1 billion this year alone and another \$1.2 billion next year. Indeed, there is a 6% automatic escalator each year of the 2004 accord to 2014. That is more money.

When I was a provincial minister of health, and the hon. member shares that thing with me, I would have thought I had died and gone to heaven if I had that money from the federal government. Now they are getting it.

* * *

ABORIGINAL AFFAIRS

Hon. Anita Neville (Winnipeg South Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this week not only marks the anniversary of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, but also that of the Kelowna accord. The two events are linked. Both sought to improve the lives of Canada's aboriginal peoples, a goal seemingly not supported by the government and evidenced by the cancellation of the Kelowna accord.

In this week's fiscal update will the Minister of Finance rectify this vindictive action and reinstate the Kelowna accord with its full \$5.1 billion funding commitment?

•(1450)

Hon. Jim Prentice (Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development and Federal Interlocutor for Métis and Non-Status Indians, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I will tell the member what the linkage is. The linkage is that the Liberals got an F on both accounts.

In the past nine months the Conservative government has signed the first modern treaty with British Columbia, the last modern treaty with the Inuit. We signed a residential school agreement. We have served notice in the House that we are going to introduce the first, first nation modern legislation on education. We have introduced national water initiatives and standards, an initiative on matrimonial property, \$300 million for northern housing and \$300 million for off reserve housing.

Canadians know who should be embarrassed.

Hon. Anita Neville (Winnipeg South Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the only A the minister got was for Harvie Andre. Hypocrisy continues unabated.

The minority government cancelled the Kelowna accord. Now it is doing all it can to defeat the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, despite its support by the majority in this Parliament.

How can the Prime Minister pretend to be a voice for human rights, as he declared over the weekend, while at the same time actively work to destroy the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples?

Hon. Jim Prentice (Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development and Federal Interlocutor for Métis and Non-Status Indians, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this is a serious matter. We have a remarkable history in the country of signing treaties. Five hundred treaties have been signed over the past 250 years. They sit on a table in this chamber.

The government does not support the declaration because that declaration jeopardizes those treaties, the enforceability and the meaning of them.

No former government in the country has ever taken a different position. To suggest the contrary is pure bunkum.

* * *

CANADIAN WHEAT BOARD

Hon. Wayne Easter (Malpeque, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, it is now being confirmed by the Conservative member for Dauphin—Swan River—Marquette that the Minister of Agriculture is not listening to farmers, but is only following the Prime Minister's orders in his attempt to destroy the Canadian Wheat Board.

Beyond his gag order, beyond his trampling on the voters' lists, beyond disenfranchising 16,000 farmers' right to vote, the minister now reportedly is using his position as minister to try to influence the outcome of producer elections against the board.

Is this another direct order from the PMO?

Hon. Chuck Strahl (Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food and Minister for the Canadian Wheat Board, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I was interested to see where that question was going. I do not have a clue what he is talking about, but that is not unusual given his way of wandering around the wilderness.

We are going to continue to consult with western Canadian farmers. We promised during the campaign that we wanted more marketing choice for them. We are going to pursue that. We are going to have a consultation, a plebiscite in January and February on barley. We urge all farmers to get involved in that plebiscite. We are interested in what they are going to say.

We do not need lessons on interference from the member opposite.

Hon. Wayne Easter (Malpeque, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, farmers do not think the minister has a clue either.

The minister's efforts to take as much as \$655 million out of the pockets of farmers, away from primary grain producers is just plain wrong. When will he work for farmers rather than against them? When will he address the age cattle blockade into the United States? When will he address the concerns of tobacco farmers? When will he put money in the pockets of farmers instead of taking it out? When will he address low farm income for farmers? Just when will the minister finally begin to work for Canadian farmers?

Oral Questions

Hon. Chuck Strahl (Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food and Minister for the Canadian Wheat Board, CPC): Mr. Speaker, there is so much work to do. After 13 years of a bungled agricultural file, we have had to fix things from stem to stern. We are busy trying to fix CAIS. We are busy trying to fix the fact that the Liberals botched the BSE file. We are trying to fix the fact that he voted against going down to confront the Americans on that file. We are trying to figure out why he wants to force western Canadian farmers to do something that he will not do in his own province.

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[Translation]

NATIONAL DEFENCE

Mr. Guy André (Berthier—Maskinongé, BQ): Mr. Speaker, there has long been criticism of the shelling in Lac Saint-Pierre, and the government has finally promised to remove the shells, but the people living along the lakeshore are now faced with contamination that threatens the water table.

Will the government conduct further studies to identify the extent of the damage it caused by using Lac Saint-Pierre as a firing range?

• (1455)

[English]

Hon. Gordon O'Connor (Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as the member knows, the Department of National Defence has an investigation going on right now. A company is there mapping out all these shells and explosives. As soon as we know the condition, we will start to correct it.

[Translation]

Mr. Guy André (Berthier—Maskinongé, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the pollution caused by National Defence is not limited to Lac Saint-Pierre. It extends to all the military bases as well. This situation has gone on long enough.

Will the government admit that it is time it shouldered its responsibilities, and will it announce that it is beginning studies and freeing up the necessary funds and that it plans to go to work right away to decontaminate what it has polluted?

[English]

Hon. Gordon O'Connor (Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, before we can take action, we have to know what the precise definition of the problem is. As I said, we have a study ongoing right now to define where the pollution is and then we will correct it.

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INCOME TRUSTS

Hon. John McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the rash Conservative promise never to tax income trusts has gone up in smoke and with it \$25 billion in savings. What is worse is the Conservatives were warned about the implications of the promise before they made it.

The Conservatives and their finance critic last year, while in opposition, were privy to briefings from the department and privy to witnesses who came before the committee and said that such a promise would send income trusts spinning out of control. The entire

public policy discussion was posted on the finance department's website.

Why does the minister not do a full monty and come clean with the Canadian public?

Hon. Jim Flaherty (Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, what happened this year and what we saw was a rapid acceleration of the quantity of conversions to income trusts. We also saw an acceleration of the quality of income trusts; that is more and more active Canadian corporations, including the two largest corporations in the telecommunications field, decided to go in that direction. This was a major change in Canada this year.

* * *

[Translation]

LEBANON

Mr. Pierre Lemieux (Glengarry—Prescott—Russell, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we were shocked to learn this morning that the Lebanese industry minister, Pierre Gemayel, had been assassinated near Beirut.

What is Canada's reaction to this terrible assassination? Is the government prepared to condemn those responsible?

Hon. Peter MacKay (Minister of Foreign Affairs and Minister of the Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am deeply troubled by Mr. Gemayel's assassination. This is a sad day for the Lebanese people. We will offer our condolences to Mr. Gemayel's family.

Canada condemns in the strongest possible way this attack on stability and democracy in Lebanon. We hope that everything possible will be done to find those responsible and bring them to justice.

[English]

We stand firmly with the Lebanese people and behind Prime Minister Saniora and his democratically elected government during these challenging times, and we condemn this terrible act of violence.

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ABORIGINAL AFFAIRS

Ms. Jean Crowder (Nanaimo—Cowichan, NDP): Mr. Speaker, Canada has refused to participate in negotiations with the UN indigenous peoples caucus for eight months. Canada is causing havoc on the United Nations floor, and our nation is opposing a declaration that will reaffirm our own Canadian Charter of Rights.

Talking about ducking, dodging, dithering and delaying, how can the minister continue to object to the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples?

Hon. Jim Prentice (Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development and Federal Interlocutor for Métis and Non-Status Indians, CPC): Mr. Speaker, stated simply, the proposed declaration is a flawed document, a flawed instrument that the government cannot support. There are serious difficulties with the document in relation to the provisions for territories and resources, lands, the concept of free and informed consent and also provisions relating to self-government.

The government remains committed to work toward a solution that is practical and workable. There are many nations in the world that are supportive of Canada's position.

As I said earlier in my comments, we have a tradition in our country, some 500 treaties signed over 250 years. They are very important to the country.

Ms. Jean Crowder (Nanaimo—Cowichan, NDP): Mr. Speaker, first nations, Métis and Inuit peoples from coast to coast are supporting this agreement. Yet we have a Prime Minister who insists that human rights will not be trumped by the almighty dollar when it comes to China.

The UN declaration affirms human rights that already exist. Why is the Prime Minister and the government willing to support human rights for Canadians in China, but not for Canadians in Canada?

• (1500)

Hon. Jim Prentice (Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development and Federal Interlocutor for Métis and Non-Status Indians, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as I previously said, the document is flawed. There are portions of the document, frankly, that could be interpreted as being inconsistent with the Canadian Constitution of 1982 and inconsistent with the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, to which my friend refers.

The United Nations General Assembly is currently considering revisions to this. A number of countries from Africa have considered and put forward the concept of a reconsideration of the text of the document. Many other western democracies are of the same view as Canada.

I would encourage the member to be patient.

* * *

FEDERAL ACCOUNTABILITY ACT

Mr. Mark Holland (Ajax—Pickering, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, yesterday the minister responsible for huffing, puffing and obfuscating hid from a direct question about nearly \$2 million in illicit donations the Conservatives took in, in their 2005 convention. Worse, they want to re-write the law they violated to let themselves off.

The minister's argument was that by breaking the law, the Conservatives might have saved taxpayers money. We should be grateful.

For the minister who thinks it is okay to break the law, to commit fraud if we can pretend to save taxpayers the bucks, will he now follow the rules, turn over the hidden books and pay back the money, or just give us another meandering rant?

Hon. John Baird (President of the Treasury Board, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I know the Conservative Party will always obey all the legislation and regulations that are brought before Parliament. I can also say that this party was not the only party which believed the policy was otherwise before one of the parliamentary committees. The leader of another political party testified that in fact they had received information from Elections Canada.

I did note something interesting for the member for Ajax—Pickering in today's *Globe and Mail*. At least two cats and a

deceased grandmother became full-fledged Liberal Party members and are now eligible to vote for the leader of the Liberal Party. What will the Liberals be doing about that?

* * *

HEALTH

Mrs. Joy Smith (Kildonan—St. Paul, CPC): Mr. Speaker, our government is concerned about the health of first nations people and is taking action.

Yesterday the Minister of Health made an announcement regarding a patient wait times guarantee for a number of first nations communities in the country. Could the minister please share the details of this announcement and the benefit it will bring?

Hon. Tony Clement (Minister of Health and Minister for the Federal Economic Development Initiative for Northern Ontario, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would be happy to provide some more details to the chamber on the new initiatives. They will ensure that pregnant native women get an initial prenatal appointment scheduled within two weeks of a positive pregnancy test and an appointment with a health care provider guaranteed every four weeks after the initial visit. At risk pregnant women will have an appointment scheduled with a specialist and will receive diagnostic services within two weeks.

We are delivering to first nations. We are delivering on the wait times guarantee. This is a tremendous step for the country and we are very proud of it.

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TAXATION

Hon. Garth Turner (Halton, Ind.): Mr. Speaker, this week a new survey showed that half of Canadians believe they are one or two missed paycheques away from poverty. My question is for the Minister of Finance.

Given the potential of an economic slowdown and a softening real estate market, will the minister move immediately, hopefully in his mini-budget this week, to give families a break and allow them to split income for income tax purposes?

Hon. Jim Flaherty (Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I assure all members that the fall fiscal update is not a mini-budget. It is an update of the fiscal situation of the Government of Canada. At the same time, an economic plan will be released that will provide some direction about matters of principle and what we intend to do in terms of taxation.

As the member opposite knows, on October 31, for the first time in Canadian history, income splitting of pensions was announced, effective January 1, 2007, which will make a great difference to pensioners of all ages in Canada.

Government Orders

● (1505)

WAYS AND MEANS

MOTION NO. 11

Hon. Jim Flaherty (Minister of Finance, CPC) moved that a ways and means motion to introduce an Act to amend the Income Tax Act, including amendments in relation to foreign investment entities and non-resident trusts, and to provide for the bijural expression of the provisions of that Act, be concurred in.

(Motion agreed to)

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POINTS OF ORDER

ORAL QUESTIONS

Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, during question period, the hon. member for Westmount—Ville-Marie asked a question of the Minister of the Environment in relation to the removal of the Government of Canada climate change website and all references to Kyoto. The minister denied that such information was removed from the Environment Canada website.

Pursuant to an access to information request, I now have in my possession a number of e-mails from within the minister's office, from her ADM and between her officials and staff.

On June 29:

Apparently Francine is meeting with the Minister's office tomorrow to talk about taking down the Climate Change site entirely.

On June 30:

...we are waiting for confirmation...to take down the climate change web site entirely.

On June 30:

I thought the govt still had an agenda for CC....

Various e-mails in July, August and September were titled "Removal of the Government of Canada Climate Change website".

On September 18, the e-mail said "I need to have the climate change website removed".

I believe the minister may have misled the House and I believe it would be appropriate for the minister, if she so wishes, to clarify her response in regard to the deputy opposition leader's question to her in regard to the removal of references to Kyoto and to the climate change website.

Hon. Rob Nicholson (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I think the Minister of the Environment was very clear. She indicated the linkages on the website whereby the member could obtain the information required.

What is surprising to me in all this is that it would seem to me that a member of the Liberal Party, in view of his party's record with respect to Kyoto, would be the very first one to want to get rid of any reference to Kyoto.

However, that is not the case and the minister has indicated the linkages.

I think the hon. member and his party should rethink their strategy on this. They should try to bury this whole subject because of their record in that particular area.

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Wascana, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am sure the government House leader will know that according to documents released by the C.D. Howe Institute, "The project green, announced last year by the former government, and the budget of 2005 combined would have taken Canada 85% toward the achievement of its Kyoto targets".

Therefore, the previous government was moving aggressively on Kyoto and it is the current government that—

The Speaker: I fear we are straying far from a point of order in this case. It sounds to me like a debate over facts.

I will reluctantly hear the member for Mississauga South very briefly, but I do not think he is getting the clarification he sought. I cannot understand why, on anything I have heard, there is anything but debate here.

Mr. Paul Szabo: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a new point of order. I gave notice to the minister about the prior point of order but in the absence of having a response from the minister, I would ask for the unanimous consent of the House to table 12 internal e-mails received under access to information that confirm the details which I have related to the House.

The Speaker: Does the hon. member for Mississauga South have the unanimous consent of the House to table these documents?

Some hon. members: No.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[English]

SOFTWOOD LUMBER PRODUCTS EXPORT CHARGE ACT, 2006

The House resumed consideration of Bill C-24, An Act to impose a charge on the export of certain softwood lumber products to the United States and a charge on refunds of certain duty deposits paid to the United States, to authorize certain payments, to amend the Export and Import Permits Act and to amend other Acts as a consequence, as reported (with amendment) from the committee, and of the motions in Group No. 1.

The Speaker: Resuming debate. Is the hon. member for Timmins—James Bay rising on a point order?

● (1510)

Mr. Charlie Angus: Mr. Speaker, I am rising because the former member had made a number of personal attacks on myself and my colleague, the member for Burnaby—New Westminster, and I was hoping he would be here to respond. However, it appears that he cut corner and ran. I would be very concerned about having to use the time for my speech to actually to respond. I was really hoping I could ask him a question.

Mr. Speaker, would it be possible to get the unanimous consent of the House that I could speak to the member's empty chair, which is what I have had to do when I go into his riding?

Government Orders

The Speaker: I am sure the hon. member would appreciate that but the practice in the House has been to not put questions to somebody who is not here. The normal practice is to have questions at the conclusion of a member's speech and that member's speech is now over. It ended some time ago, so the period for questions and comments went out the window with the member. I am afraid the hon. member will need to use up some of his own valuable time to respond if, as and when the time arises.

The hon. member for Timmins—James Bay is now rising on debate.

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to speak today. I find it fascinating and very telling that the member for Thunder Bay—Rainy River made his statements and then scrambled out of the House before questions and comments. I will be speaking to an empty chair but that has been the sort of situation that we have been facing in northern Ontario.

I listened to the hon. member's speech and what it—

Mr. John Williams (Edmonton—St. Albert, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. You know and everyone else knows, including the member for Timmins—James Bay, that there is a long-standing rule in the House that members do not make reference to the fact that someone is not in the chamber. He keeps talking about empty chairs and wishing the member were here so he could speak to him.

I would ask that he respect the rules of the House. If he wants to give a speech, which nobody really wants to hear, we will let him give it but he should also abide by the rules.

The Speaker: I know the hon. member for Timmins—James Bay, in referring to an empty chair without mentioning anybody, is in order because of course there are some empty chairs in the chamber, as we can all see. However, he does not normally want to do that in relation to any individual member. The fact that he is unable to ask a question of a member who had been making a speech some time ago and was nameless was fine, but once he starts naming names he is sort of stepping over the line.

I would caution him to respect the rules in this regard and avoid reference to a member's presence or absence in the chamber because if we were to get into absences, as the hon. member knows, we could go on at some length.

The hon. member for Timmins—James Bay can continue.

Mr. Charlie Angus: Mr. Speaker, I feel very chastened by that. The fact that the seat that was empty, but will not be mentioned, is no longer empty makes my point moot, so I will start over again.

When I was listening to the member's speech, it reminded me of being in a madhouse funhouse with the distorted mirrors of who said what and positions were upside down when they were really flipped over, and what was really black was white. It seems to me that we would need a political Emma Peel and a political John Steed to actually work through the labyrinth of Liberal misconceptions being perpetrated.

The biggest misperception, and I do not take it personally, is that when I and my colleague went to Thunder Bay to take part in a public debate, it was characterized as some kind of low grade

character assassination, that it was completely outrageous for a member of Parliament to do his due diligence and engage in debate. I feel I have to clarify that just for the folks at home to understand the kind of political chicanery machinations we are dealing with in the language here.

The hon. member had stated that the NDP had initiated this public meeting and we tried to set it up as some kind of publicity stunt, when the fact was that we were invited. We were invited by members of the member's own constituency. We were invited by CEP. We were invited by the United Steelworkers to a public meeting and we agreed to come. The fact that they were unavailable or chose not to come is beside the point, but it was made very clear at the public meeting held by CEP in Thunder Bay, to which we were asked to go along with the members from the Thunder Bay region, that if they were not able to come, we would be more than happy to go back to Thunder Bay to debate them in an open forum.

I do not see how that could be characterized as character assassination to any extent, unless of course one group doing its job and another not doing its job is somehow character assassination of those not doing their work.

To bring the point home, I will read a letter that was written in the Thunder Bay *Chronicle Journal* on October 31, 2006. The people who put on this event felt it very necessary to clarify the spin being put out by the member who had not been there at the time but who is now sitting in his seat right here.

Joe Hanlon, president of the United Steelworkers in Thunder Bay, said that he was publicly responding to the letter from the MP for Thunder Bay—Rainy River. He said that if that member and the other member from Thunder Bay would like to come before the people of northern Ontario to discuss why they have voted in favour of a sellout softwood lumber deal, he would invite Roger Falconer from the Steelworkers, Cec Makowski from CEP, as well as the two NDP MPs, and MPP Howard Hampton, the provincial NDP leader, and ask them to come back to Thunder Bay. He went on to say:

Even though these individuals, two of whom are MPs from other ridings, came to attend our meeting here in Thunder Bay last Thursday, our two MPs couldn't or wouldn't take the time or effort to show up. [The member for Thunder Bay—Rainy River] states that he is listening to his constituents. It would be nice to know who he listens to because I know that a lot of people have sent him letters asking him to vote against this bad deal. If you look at the recent issue of [the member for Thunder Bay—Rainy River's] "Report to Constituents", there is not one mention of forestry.

That is the word of constituents from Thunder Bay, people who are involved in the industry and who are concerned. When I went to Thunder Bay to speak to them, I went there because I am a northerner and I had been invited there. He had been invited there. I would like to meet him anytime in Thunder Bay. I will meet him here, but to say that I was involved in character assassination when I was fighting for the rights of people in northern Ontario, I think it goes without saying that it is very typical of what we have been seeing here.

We see other members standing up and trying to create a solid Liberal front, standing up to softwood, when in fact they have shut down the debates. They have shut down the public hearings. They have accused our attempt to have public input as some kind of waste of their royal time. I find that very shameful.

Government Orders

There are many issues that have to be addressed with this deal. I would like to refer, for example, to the comment of the member for Thunder Bay—Rainy River, on May 17 in *Hansard*, where he said that this deal was a “stab in the back”. Why is it a stab in the back? It is a stab in the back because this deal accepted the fundamental American argument from the beginning. The deal says that we in Canada agree that we have unfairly subsidized our industry, which is a falsehood, and that we must completely change how we deal with forestry in order to please the Americans.

• (1515)

I would say that the member is correct. It is a stab in the back. It is a stab in the back to our industry that tried to maintain a solid line and looked to government for help.

On September 25 the member stated that the constant shifting position of the Prime Minister has caused much confusion about what it is we are voting for or against. I would actually infer that as confusion within the Liberal Party in terms of whether it was going to stand up or sit down. He said:

Now that the actual motion has been presented and we see what it actually says, on principle, I must now vote against the deal. The motion spends more words punishing Canadian companies than it does trying to achieve a positive agreement.

That is what the member said and on that point I would certainly agree with him because we were in an unprecedented situation where the Parliament of Canada was being asked to act as a predator on its own industry. We were being asked within this House to impose illegal penalties that we had won in trade dispute mechanism after trade dispute mechanism. They were recognized as illegal, but we were going to add on penalties to our own workers and on top of that, we would add on a further penalty for the companies that did not buckle under.

Of course I would say that it is a stab in the back and a deal that is attempting to please the Americans rather than help our own industry. Why the member three weeks later stood up and gave the big two thumbs up to the agreement, I am still not quite sure.

There are many issues about this agreement that need to be examined. We have talked with industry. We have talked with the workers. We have talked with the communities across northern Ontario that are going down. The question is, the government had the ability under the Liberals and it did not do it. It had it under the Conservatives in order to give some funding up front in order to alleviate the cashflow problems that industry was facing.

We now see that for the companies that have signed on, the government is flowing taxpayers' money to them through the EDC payments. That money could have been flowed before and it would have allowed our companies the necessary financial breathing room because they really are at the end of their ropes.

What is amazing about the deal is the notion we have accepted here of crippling our own markets, of putting export taxes on the value added for wood products. Many of our companies have their head offices in the southern United States. It is very clear that an American company looking to invest would not invest in a crippled market. Companies would not invest where they would be paying higher export tariffs if they create value added in their wood. They will be investing south of the border. Why? Because they have \$450 million of our money. They are our direct competitors. Plus they

have another \$500 million given to the George Bush administration to do with what it wants.

There was not a penny, nothing, rien, nada for our own communities that have gone down right across the country. They were pleading for help. They were pleading for retooling. They got nothing. The message given to the people of Smooth Rock Falls, Opasatika, Red Rock and communities like them was that they were being cut adrift from the economy of this country and that they are on their own.

There are moments in the House when we do need to stand up and speak to the bigger principle. The bigger principle here is the fact that we have a situation where a government looking for a quick photo opportunity signed off on an agreement and accepted everything that the American trade interests wanted, and sold our own industry down the river. One of the prime economic engines of our country was sold down the river. Thousands upon thousands of jobs are dependent on it. Communities across northern Canada are dependent on this. Where was the government? It sold them out. That is unacceptable.

As the New Democratic Party, we will continue to fight in the House to make sure that every single amendment that affects our communities and our jobs will be heard.

• (1520)

Mr. Roger Valley (Kenora, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like the member to think about how many hundreds or thousands of jobs have been lost in his riding and lost in all of northern Ontario. It is not necessarily due to the softwood lumber agreement; it has something to do with the forestry industry itself.

We had the opportunity to travel to Timmins to make an announcement late last fall, just before Christmas. We talked about \$1.6 billion for forestry companies, money that was going to help them stay in business, money that was going to keep jobs in northern Ontario. That money was going to make sure that families could have a good Christmas and continue to live in dignity in northern Ontario. But the member and his party at that point saw fit to side with the Conservatives and bring on an election that no Canadians wanted. It cost jobs all throughout northern Ontario.

We knew the way was not to sell out Canada on a softwood deal. We knew we had to support the companies to make sure they had the resources, to make sure they could keep those mills running, to keep the sawmills going to provide employment in northern Ontario.

My direct question is, how many jobs did the member lose in his riding and how many were lost in northern Ontario because of his sellout to the Conservative Party which forced the election and took the \$1.6 billion away from the forestry companies?

Mr. Charlie Angus: Mr. Speaker, I could say I am surprised at the question, but I am not, because it looks like one of those funny little 10 percenters the Liberals spread across northern Ontario in an attempt to change the facts.

The reality is that the member's own former government went on the nation's television to plead with the Canadian public when the Liberals were caught in one of the most disgraceful scandals in Canadian history, promising an election 30 days after the Gomery report which would have put the election in March 2006.

Government Orders

Suddenly in the great Liberal rewriting of history there was this betrayal, this secret night of the long knives where the heartless NDP stood up with all the poor peasants and tossed the member's party out on its royal petard. Before the Liberals went, they crossed the country promising things they never delivered in 12 years. It was the great red book of all red books, the great mother of red books.

The Liberals came into my riding on the eve of the election and they had the nerve, they had the gall to tell people, "Vote for us. Keep us in power and we will give you money". Meanwhile, our communities had been down here time and time again asking the former prime minister to work with the forestry industry and they got nothing. They got zero. But on the eve of the election it was like, "Stick with mama Liberal and we will feed all you little children".

Now there is this hilarious rewrite that allows the Liberals to send their 10 percenters into ridings across the country saying, "Under the Liberal government we created all the great child care spaces; under the Liberal government we saved the environment; under the Liberal government we were there for the forestry industry". The Liberals did nothing for the forestry industry and thousands of jobs went down. When we were asking for the money to be put up front they did nothing. That is when the jobs would have been saved.

• (1525)

Mr. Paul Dewar (Ottawa Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I listened with interest to my colleague's comments. His perception and analysis remind me of the flesh-eating disease and that is when the body politic here is eating upon itself. That is what this deal is about. We are actually taking the decisions that were dealt with in the United States court and saying, "No, no. That is not good enough for us. We will make sure we penalize our own industry, our own people and our producers".

We travelled as a caucus to northern Ontario and Thunder Bay to talk to the people there. I was profoundly moved by the challenges in front of the people there. They are not getting a lot of support, not only from the current government but from the previous government and the present provincial government. It is really quite sad.

If this deal goes through, what will it do to the people in the member's constituency? Because this deal is no good, what can we do? Obviously we need to propose something that is better. I would like the member's take on that.

Mr. Charlie Angus: Mr. Speaker, I would love to have the time to explain what needs to be done, but I will be very brief. The effects of this deal will be profound and they will be profound across the rural regions of northern Canada.

That is why we needed to have hearings. Hearings are what all governments need to do. It is what Parliament does. It is part of our work. It is to hear from the people affected. Yet the hearings were squashed because, as the Liberal member said earlier on, they thought the NDP was wasting their time with filibustering and all kinds of inconsequentials, the inconsequentials being the voice of the people of Thunder Bay, the voice of the people of The Pas, Manitoba, the voice of the people of northern British Columbia. The Liberals worked with the Conservatives to squash the hearings.

If there had been hearings, if the public, labour, business from across the country had spoken, we would have heard what was

wrong with this deal and we would have heard some good solutions. But no. The Liberals would rather send their 10 percenters out with their mistruths and their rewrites of history than to hear from the people of Canada. That is one voice they always hate to hear from, because at the end of the day the people of Canada will stand up and say, "You are selling us down the river, you and the Conservatives".

Hon. Roy Cullen (Etobicoke North, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to rise to speak at third reading of Bill C-24, the softwood lumber products export charge act.

I have spoken on the bill at various stages, but I feel quite strongly that this bill is the wrong way to proceed. I am very disappointed that we have a Minister of Natural Resources on the Conservative side who seems to be missing in action. Where is the Minister of Natural Resources in defending our forestry communities? Where is our Minister of Natural Resources in dealing with the issues that are presented in the softwood lumber deal, which is a bad deal and sets a horrible precedent?

However, not only are there those issues. I am not surprised that steelworkers are concerned about this. If I were a worker in the steel industry, I would be concerned. If we can win every single battle at the NAFTA panels, as well as independent reviews as to whether softwood in Canada is subsidized, but we still cave in and cut a deal, what does that mean for other sectors? I would be concerned if I were a steelworker.

The Minister of Natural Resources has a responsibility to speak out in support of our natural resource economy, but where has the minister been? Recently two large Canadian icons in the mining sector, Inco and Falconbridge, were taken over and gobbled up. Where was the Minister of Natural Resources? Maybe he was in China trying to sell uranium or trying to do something over there, but he was not here defending Canadian interests.

He is not listening to the forest industry and forestry communities when they are telling him they need to combine into larger entities so they can compete globally but that we have a process at the Competition Bureau which does not support this. We know that the domestic forest products market in Canada is very small. The market is the United States, Europe or Asia. There are really no competition policy issues for domestic consumers of forest products in Canada. Would one not think that the forest industry companies could consolidate in Canada so they could get the economies of scale and scope they need to compete internationally? No, because the process is flawed. The minister stands up and says he is going to fix it, but we are still waiting.

Where is the Minister of Natural Resources when the industry says it has a huge problem with energy? Energy used to be a competitive advantage in our forest products industry in Canada. Where is the minister when the industry talks about that?

Government Orders

The forest industry has huge possibilities in regard to converting biomass into energy, into electricity that in fact would be surplus to its needs. It could sell that electricity to the grid, but it needs support, policies and programs to help make the conversion. The stress that the forest industry is under today does not allow it to make those needed investments. This would have a huge, positive environmental impact and it would also help the industry competitively in reducing its energy costs significantly. The cost of energy is one of the industry's big problems.

Where is the Minister of Natural Resources in talking to the Minister of International Trade to say that we have to diversify our markets? We cannot rely as we used to on the U.S. softwood lumber market. Whatever we do, we know that it is not a stable market for us. Where is the Minister of Natural Resources in talking to the Minister of International Trade and saying that we have to find more markets for our products, markets other than the United States?

Where is the Minister of Natural Resources when the industry tells him that we have huge labour shortages looming in the forest industry in Canada? What is the minister doing about that? We do not hear anything from the minister on these very important points.

With respect to the deal, where was the Minister of Natural Resources in speaking out for communities? I understand that there are some communities whose members of Parliament are listening to the sawmills and the companies in their towns, and so they should. But companies go to them and say they would like the members to support a deal because the federal Conservative government is holding a gun to their heads. Federal ministers are saying to them that if they do not sign the deal, they will cut off all support to the forest industry.

What kind of coercion is that? That is called duress. No wonder some of the companies are saying that we should sign the deal. It is because they do not have any real choice. How can the forest products industry in Canada fight a countervailing duty claim by the United States without support from the federal government? It cannot be done. The industry knows it.

• (1530)

Our Liberal government supported the industry in the fight. We had a two-track process. We were supporting the industry in the fight through the NAFTA panels, the litigation and all that morass, and we were also looking at whether we could negotiate a deal. We never saw a deal that was worth cutting and the deal before us is no such deal either.

The agreement sets out certain aspects that are very disadvantageous for the forest products industry. It calls on the companies to drop their lawsuits. Once they drop their lawsuits, they can sign on and get their rebate. In fact, the rebates are going out as we speak, through the Canadian Export Development Corporation, at an irrevocable discount, I might add. If this deal is not followed through on, those companies will not be able to get the 20¢ that they have left on the table, the \$1 billion that the Conservative government has left on the table.

However, some of the companies are doing it because they do not have much choice. The government has basically pulled the rug out from underneath the forest products industry in Canada.

The previous Liberal government proposed a package of \$1.5 billion. In fact, in today's environment, that ante probably would have to be increased. It would have supported the industry. It would have supported the industry in using biomass energy to help companies reduce their energy costs. It was a package that would have helped them diversify their markets. The package would have helped them innovate. It would have helped them with some tax measures and made them more competitive with the U.S. softwood lumber producers and the U.S. forest products industry.

Where was the Minister of Natural Resources while the sawmills, pulp mills and newsprint operations in Quebec, Ontario and British Columbia were dropping like flies? Where was the Minister of Natural Resources in defending these forestry based communities? We do not hear from him. What initiatives has the minister come forward with? Nothing. This is a tragedy, because the forest industry is being devastated. It is being hurt very badly and we do not hear a peep from the Minister of Natural Resources.

We hear something from the trade minister, but we do not hear anything from the Minister of Natural Resources. We hear that he is travelling in China and here and there, but we do not hear anything about concrete measures that would help the forest industry in Canada.

Next, there will be foreign takeover proposals for our oil and gas industry and our forest products industry, and maybe there will be more in our mining industry. Where is the Minister of Natural Resources in speaking out?

We know what the position of the Minister of Industry is on these points. His position is that the markets will solve everything, the markets will prevail, and the government has to get out of the way and allow the markets to resolve everything.

What about the question of whether this is in Canada's national interest to allow our natural resource icons, our natural resource assets, to be gobbled up by companies outside of Canada? Does this make any sense? We should have a debate in Canada about this. We should not allow foreign companies to just take over Canada by stealth. Let us have a good public policy debate about it.

Where is our Minister of Natural Resources when it comes to standing up for Inco, for Falconbridge, for the oil and gas industry and for the forest industry? We do not hear much from him. This is a time when the Minister of Natural Resources should be defending the interests of our forestry communities and our natural resource communities across Canada. We hear nothing from him. It is a shame. It is a crime.

It is most unfortunate, because the gun is being held to the heads of some of these companies. The companies then go to their members of Parliament and say that they need their members of Parliament to sign this deal. It is a bad deal, they say, but they do not have any choice because the Conservative government has pulled the rug right out from under them.

Government Orders

These issues are understandable. If we had a Minister of Natural Resources who actually stood up for the forestry communities, we would not be in this mess. We would not have the policies being dictated by a Prime Minister who goes to Cancun and allegedly comes back with something. He did not come back with anything. We are now mired in Bill C-24, which should be defeated forthwith.

• (1535)

Mr. Wayne Marston (Hamilton East—Stoney Creek, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would say to the member opposite that the steel manufacturing sector in Hamilton is shaking in its boots right now because of the style, or the lack thereof, of the negotiations that are now taking place.

On the member's comments about the Minister of Natural Resources and how ineffective he sees that individual being in the House, I would say more rhetorically that perhaps the minister, along with the rest of Canada, was sold out by the Minister of International Trade.

Hon. Roy Cullen: Mr. Speaker, I would say to the member for Hamilton East—Stoney Creek that of course Hamilton is a big steel town and it should be concerned, because if we can win battle after battle at independent panels and debunk the lie that softwood lumber in Canada is subsidized, and if we have to cave in when we are winning all the battles, what are we going to do with steel? What are we going to do with other sectors? This sets a terrible precedent.

As well, within itself, it is a bad deal. It has the anti-circumvention clause, which would allow U.S. softwood lumber producers to challenge any forest policies developed in Canada, whether at the federal or the provincial level, because they might not like them. They might think the policies do something to help our industry. What if the federal government wanted to help the industry to innovate, to help them adapt to biomass and develop their biomass energy resources? U.S. producers might say that is a circumvention of this trade deal.

The member for Hamilton East—Stoney Creek is right. We know that Prime Minister has his ministers on a very short lead. I think the Minister of Natural Resources is on about a six inch lead.

• (1540)

Mr. Pat Martin (Winnipeg Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would not blame people who are at home watching this debate for trying to figure out what exactly happened, because many of them may have tuned in a couple of years ago to see the current Minister of International Trade when he was on the other side of the House, when he was a Liberal minister arguing the softwood lumber deal. At that time, he was trying to sell Canadians a bit of a bill of goods or a package that none of us found suitable, but then he flip-flopped over to the Conservative benches and, within weeks of being a Conservative minister, he came to us with a package that suddenly we were supposed to take. Suddenly it was as good as he could do.

I wonder if my colleague could point out the irony in the situation. First, we do not believe Canadians were well served by this minister when he was on either side of the House. Second, what can he tell Canadians to give them any confidence that someone is driving this bus with any degree of competence?

Hon. Roy Cullen: Mr. Speaker, I wish I could give the member that feeling of confidence about the driver of the bus, but I am afraid I cannot.

In the last Parliament when the Liberal Party formed the government, there were a lot of discussions with the U.S. about a potential deal, but I would say that within our caucus the bar was set very high, extremely high, so high that the deal would have to be so good as to be almost perfect, because we were winning on the other track.

What happened, I think, when our former minister of industry went over to the other side in a sort of horrible act of treason, if we want to call it that, was that he then came under the influence of the new republicanization of Canada's government. I think he was convinced by the Prime Minister. They had a little chat with President Bush in Cancun and figured out a way to do this deal. The deal had been rejected by our Liberal caucus.

This deal was part of a package. We are still waiting for what the Prime Minister came away with from that meeting, because he talked about the fact that for travel in the western hemisphere we would get something less than a passport, but that had been on the table for about a year and a half.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Serge Cardin (Sherbrooke, BQ): Mr. Speaker, it is with little enthusiasm that I rise now to again speak to the House about Bill C-24. This bill aims to impose export charges—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): The hon. Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food on a point of order.

[*English*]

Hon. Chuck Strahl: Mr. Speaker, I am sorry to interrupt the current speaker, but I came in as quickly as I could, having watched the previous speaker make I think an outrageous claim accusing the Minister of International Trade of treason. I would ask him to withdraw that comment. That is obviously outrageous and he should withdraw that comment immediately.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): I thank the hon. Minister of Agriculture for his comments. I must admit to him that I did not hear the comment. I will look at the blues and take his comments under advisement.

[*Translation*]

The hon. member for Sherbrooke has the floor.

Mr. Serge Cardin: Mr. Speaker, it is now with even less enthusiasm that I again speak to Bill C-24.

As I was saying, this bill aims to impose charges on certain softwood lumber products exported to the United States and charges on the refund of certain customs deposits paid in the United States.

It is positively appalling to see a bill that imposes such charges on an industry that is having enough problems, in addition to charges—that I would say are illegal—imposed by the United States for many years.

Government Orders

The Bloc Québécois believes that the softwood lumber agreement that was signed is not the breakthrough of the century. This is really not what the softwood lumber industry needed. The United States, which imposed duties on softwood lumber for many years, levied approximately \$5.4 billion from the forest industry, of which \$1 billion will be returned to the United States. As for the other \$4.4 billion, it will be paid back to the industry.

The reason the forestry industry is having problems at present is clearly because of inaction on the part of one government after another: inaction by the Liberal government followed by inaction by the Conservative government. From the very beginning, the Bloc Québécois repeatedly called on the Liberal government of the day to implement measures to support the forestry industry. First, the Bloc asked for loan guarantees. It knew that some day the industry would win its cases against the United States. So the government could have given advances, or lent money, or guaranteed loans. That would have given the forestry industry a chance to preserve a large number of jobs.

It would be wrong to say that this would have preserved all those jobs, because we know that the softwood lumber industry is cyclical. A large share of the job losses could have been avoided, however, if the Liberal government had given loan guarantees at that time. As well, the Bloc suggested a number of other measures and is still suggesting them, in spite of the implementation of the agreement, Bill C-24, and the law that will ensue.

The Conservative government came next. The worst thing is that even in January of this year the Conservative government was making campaign promises saying that it would support the forestry industry. It would have supported it precisely by giving it loan guarantees. As soon as the government was elected, the promise was forgotten. That was the end of loan guarantees. The government negotiated a softwood lumber agreement.

There are a number of bizarre circumstances in this case. For example, the government was negotiating an agreement while the industry was engaged in proceedings against the United States. How would the United States see this situation? The government was negotiating with them, the industry was bringing proceedings against them. The United States was in a position of strength. They knew very well that the courts would find that what the United States was charging the softwood lumber industry was illegal. Canada and the industry would have recovered all of the duties that had been collected by the United States.

At the same time, the Conservative Party was negotiating an agreement. What, exactly, was going on? We might think that what was going on was appalling.

• (1545)

The money of course belonged to the softwood lumber industry—\$5.4 billion dollars—and the agreement signed by the Conservative government let \$1 billion of it go. Why? As administrative fees for collecting duties charged to the Canadian forestry industry? This is a completely bizarre situation and we cannot follow it. Today, however, we have to acknowledge that the agreement exists and that the purpose of this bill is to act on it and to implement the softwood lumber agreement. We know perfectly well that something else could have been done, and certainly that the Bloc Québécois is not

particularly enthusiastic about this outcome. Nonetheless, the industry has asked us to support it through all the ups and downs it has been through and all these problems, problems that I would say were virtually invented by the United States, throughout this long period of time.

In Quebec, the industry, if I may say so, was on the brink of bankruptcy. People want the forestry industry to survive in Quebec, and certainly they needed to recover that money, their money the United States had made off with. So they let \$1 billion go, money that will moreover, and this is odious, assist the United States forestry industry. This makes absolutely no sense. So this begs the question. Why? Why did the Conservative government let \$1 billion go to the United States of America when the forestry industry needed it so badly? Why?

Why give someone \$1 billion if you know perfectly well that the courts and the judges are going to tell you in the end that the duties imposed by the U.S. were illegal? Why leave \$1 billion in the U.S.? Since nothing in the hypotheses we might come up with makes sense, we could quite simply say that it is for future considerations. What are they? I leave it up to the people, the public and other MPs to figure out what it might be, though it definitely will not be anything very brilliant or perhaps even legal.

We know exactly who comes out ahead in the softwood lumber agreement. I repeat, of the \$5.4 billion, only \$4.4 billion has been reimbursed, and \$1 billion remains in the United States. Who is the winner here? The U.S. companies, of course, which are going to cash in \$500 million and are going to invest in their industry, in their businesses. A \$50 million fund will go to initiatives aimed at promoting the use of wood for both residential and commercial purposes, and \$450 million will be left to the discretion of the American government. This is an unexpected windfall for the Republican Party. At that point, it was just in time for the elections. Still, we know how that turned out. Not everything can be bought.

To conclude, I repeat that the Bloc Québécois reluctantly supports this agreement. The cut-rate negotiations of the Conservative minority government will have served to jeopardize the forest industry, particularly in Quebec. The return of funds collected illegally, contrary to what the Minister of Industry appears to believe, is not a miraculous injection of money, or a gift from the government. It is the industry's money that is going back to the industry. We must never forget that.

It is time to give the industry a chance to recover, at least for the companies that have not already given up the ghost.

• (1550)

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc (Beauséjour, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate my Bloc Québécois colleague's comments. I had the opportunity to work with him and the other member of the Bloc Québécois who is on the Standing Committee on International Trade. We share many of their concerns.

As I indicated in a question earlier this morning, members of the Liberal Party in the House of Commons are very concerned. With the amendments proposed by the Minister of International Trade, the government is trying to change certain improvements, certain amendments that the Standing Committee on International Trade adopted weeks ago.

Government Orders

My question for my Bloc Québécois colleague is very simple: Will the Bloc Québécois vote in favour of the amendments proposed by the Minister of International Trade—those that are in the first or second group on the list of amendments the Speaker has selected for debate?

Will the Bloc Québécois support the minister's amendments when the time comes to put them to the vote?

• (1555)

Mr. Serge Cardin: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the member for Beauséjour. Dozens of amendments were proposed during the clause by clause study. There were about 132 of them. We knew that many of those amendments would be a waste of time, but that some of them, a few at least, would be good ones. We supported some of those amendments in committee.

Then there were the amendments proposed at the report stage. There were 95 of them. Mr. Speaker, you selected only 19 of those. It made sense not to open some of the amendments up to discussion. However, some of those amendments were very important.

The Bloc Québécois intends to support some of the amendments in the second group. It appears the Bloc Québécois will not support any of the amendments in the first group. We will have an opportunity to discuss this in detail when we go through the second group of amendments. At that time, we will discuss exactly how we intend to support the government. We may even have an opportunity to support the Liberal Party.

[*English*]

Ms. Chris Charlton (Hamilton Mountain, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I listened with great interest to the comments from my colleague across the way. I must say that I am a little bit surprised because he tried to sort of contort himself into a pretzel in his logic.

I have been very proud to work with the members from that side of the House in supporting labour legislation, in supporting progressive legislation like getting the anti-scab law past second reading, and in speaking to the motion on income support for older workers. I was proud to do that. Yet, here I see the members justifying their support and their party's support for the softwood sellout by saying that they have listened to industry and that this is what industry wanted.

What about the workers in the forestry sector? How will the member go back to the communities in his riding and talk to the steelworkers who have been here on the Hill, and who have talked to us about the devastating impact that this deal will have, not just on the workers but on their families and on the communities in which they find themselves.

If the hon. member wants to have a record of supporting the workers in this country, he must oppose this deal. I would urge the member to reconsider before we get to the final vote on this deal. He should come join us and oppose the softwood sellout.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Serge Cardin: Mr. Speaker, it is somewhat disturbing to hear such things. People who are watching these House debates must be wondering what is going on.

We know that the hon. member for Burnaby—New Westminster has often repeated—as did the member for Hamilton Mountain—that the industry does not want us to vote in favour of Bill C-24 and that it even wants us to oppose the agreement that was already reached.

In Quebec, we consulted everyone, including the industry and forestry workers, and everyone wants us to pass Bill C-24. So, that is what we will do, on behalf of the industry and the workers.

• (1600)

[*English*]

Ms. Dawn Black (New Westminster—Coquitlam, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I want to start by thanking my colleague from Burnaby—New Westminster who has done such admirable work on the bill before the House. He has been unstinting in the effort he has put into opposition on Bill C-24, in contrast to what has happened with the other opposition parties. He has consistently been a strong voice on every aspect of the legislation, while other opposition parties have caved in and supported the government's side on amendments without even any debate. They have moved amendments, voted against them and moved on without any real debate. It is a shocking indictment of our democracy. Again, I pay tribute to the member for Burnaby—New Westminster for the opposition he has provided.

I first spoke on the bill last month at second reading. One of the things I said was that the softwood lumber agreement would further downsize the Canadian softwood industry and that there would be huge impacts on softwood communities and on workers in British Columbia and elsewhere in Canada. Little did I know how quickly that would start to happen.

In my own community of New Westminster, Western Forest Products has announced that it will shut down its sawmill on February 7. It will be laying off 284 workers. Industrial consolidation has been a part of this, but also the impact of the softwood lumber tax on the coastal forest industry were given as reasons behind the closure of this mill.

Brian Harder, who is the president of the Steelworkers Union Local 1-3567, which represents the workers in New Westminster, says:

I think it is a direct result of the softwood lumber agreement. [The mill] makes wood for the American market, does it profitably, yet they are shutting it down....

The closure of the 92-year-old New Westminster mill came as a surprise because it has been profitable.

The workers are devastated. Their future is gone. This crew has done everything asked of them to improve productivity. Yet for all the work they have done, they are out of a job now.

This affects not only the workers. It also affects their families and my community in New Westminster, the small businesses where these workers spend their money.

I spoke earlier about my colleague from Burnaby—New Westminster and the work he has done on this. He proposed to the committee that it hold public hearings. The government and the opposition voted it down. The only public hearings that were held on the legislation were in Nanaimo, British Columbia, on Vancouver Island, and in Thunder Bay. Those public hearings were supported by the Steelworkers Union and a large number of people came out to speak in opposition to this legislation.

Government Orders

I do not know why the government is so afraid to listen to the people whose lives are impacted by the very legislation it puts forward in the House.

The committee only heard from two witnesses. One, a lawyer, Elliot Feldman, testified that people who did not follow the new rules set out in the bill could be sent to prison for up to 18 months. He also called the bill draconian in nature. He said that it would allow for inspections without warrants and for the government to seize transferred funds at any time. That is pretty alarming testimony.

Another witness, trade lawyer Darrel Pearson, pointed out that the lack of precise definitions in the bill could trigger more litigation and trigger it almost immediately.

As I said, there were only those two witnesses at that stage of the committee hearings.

It is important to go back and talk about the trade victories that Canada had on this legislation.

On August 13, 2003, NAFTA ruled that the 18% tariff imposed on softwood lumber by the U.S. was too high. Two weeks later, the WTO panel concluded that the U.S. wrongly applied harsh duties on Canadian softwood exports.

•(1605)

On August 10, 2005, the extraordinary challenge panel under NAFTA dismissed American claims that the earlier NAFTA decision in favour of Canada violated trade rules.

In March the NAFTA panel ruled in Canada's favour, saying that Canadian softwood lumber exports were not subsidized. The total duty collected by the U.S. at that point was \$5.2 million.

This deal kills any credibility that the NAFTA dispute mechanism may have had. It was supposed to ensure the full refund to the Canadian softwood industry of the \$5.3 billion in illegally collected duties. It makes the dispute mechanism of NAFTA totally meaningless and useless.

It seems the deal can be cancelled unilaterally at any time and it does not provide stability and predictability for the Canadian softwood industry.

Bill C-24 is fiscally flawed, as well. The payout is based on Canadian softwood exporters, which are owed the equivalent of 95% of the total \$5.3 billion in illegal duties that have been paid to the U.S. We know that the Conservatives have not reached the 95% target, which means additional costs to the Canadian softwood industry and to the Canadian taxpayer. Most important, the deal does nothing for the thousands of workers who lost their livelihoods over the past five years. There is nothing in the softwood sellout to deal with the major disruption that the U.S. abuse of trade rules has caused to working families and to our communities all across the country.

As I said earlier, it is going to trigger significant job losses in the future through consolidation caused by the quotas and export taxes and by discouraging Canadian value added production and stimulating more raw log exports, which is something that none of us wanted to see. Sadly, the agreement discriminates against Canadian companies that refuse to sign on to the softwood sellout by resorting to a bullying and fiscal arm twisting tactics.

Many companies and workers in my community were opposed to this deal. They have not been heard by or listened to by the government. Their concerns were not part of the agreement. The participation process was flawed. While U.S. customs slapped punitive taxes on about 1,500 Canadian softwood companies, the Minister of International Trade secretly consulted with a core group of about 25 large softwood companies. These are the only companies to which he listened, not the majority of companies in British Columbia or in the rest of Canada, the smaller forestry companies, their workers and their families. They were not heard.

The deal will not deter American litigation in the future, as has already been shown by the recent move of the Bush administration to overturn the U.S. Court of International Trade decision of April 7 and July 14, which ruled the Byrd amendment could not apply to Canadian merchandise. It was another win for Canada that the government chose to ignore.

The Conservatives are trying to tell Canadians that the deal will end litigation, but years from now, looking back, we know this argument will be unconvincing as more and more small communities feel the pinch of job losses and mill closures. The deal does not account for the seasonal nature of the market. Companies are not allowed the flexibility to sufficiently carry forward export quotas to other months.

The softwood industry was bullied into supporting the deal. Witnesses at committee confirmed that the Conservative government coerced the softwood industry into accepting a flawed deal. The bullying forced the cash strapped softwood industry to capitulate, just a few months away from winning the final legal battle against American tariffs.

We have seen the effects of the softwood dispute across the country and we have particularly seen them in my province of British Columbia. Coastal communities, communities like mine on the Fraser River, have been so negatively impacted by this. It really has had a terrible impact. These trade disputes are not just games. They have real effects on the lives of real people.

I urge the government to rethink this and I urge the opposition parties to unite behind turning this bill down.

Mr. Wayne Marston (Hamilton East—Stoney Creek, NDP): Mr. Speaker, there is inconsistency in what I am hearing about the lack of committee hearings.

I understand the member for Burnaby—New Westminster was trying to get hearings across the country. Where I find the inconsistency is the Liberal Party, which signed the original NAFTA deal, argued against hearings. Is it correct that in committee the Liberals blocked hearings across the country? I could not imagine why they would not want to hear from Canadians on this.

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•(1610)

Ms. Dawn Black: Mr. Speaker, that is one of the inconsistencies we have seen from the official opposition since the beginning of the softwood sellout.

I understand that my colleague, the member for Burnaby—New Westminster, pushed for cross-country hearings and the opposition parties agreed with the government party and said no to any travelling by the committee to hear from the workers, who are so negatively affected in these communities.

Then the question was asked as to whether the affected workers and small businesses could come to Ottawa so the committee could hear their testimony. The answer from the official opposition was no. It did not want to hear from the very people who were most seriously impacted by this legislation.

It is a dilemma to understand how members of the official opposition could say that they are opposed to this legislation when they were not willing to hear from the very people who are most adversely impacted by it.

Ms. Chris Charlton (Hamilton Mountain, NDP): Mr. Speaker, my colleague has obviously had a ton of first-hand experience with the very direct impact in her community and home province with the implementation of the softwood deal. She has made it quite clear that this deal, especially in the forestry sector, has been unbelievably harmful. It has affected workers, their families and the entire community.

I come from a community that has been known as “Steeltown”. It has already been devastated by the job losses experienced in a declining manufacturing sector. Obviously trade deals are very important not just in the forestry sector, but in the steel sector as well.

Could the member tell me from her experience and review of the softwood deal if there is any hope at all for those of us in Steeltown, whether trade deals affecting the steel sector might be next and we will lose the same kinds of jobs in our home town as have been lost in her community?

Ms. Dawn Black: Mr. Speaker, my colleague, the hon. member for Hamilton Mountain, raises a very serious concern. The softwood sellout has put the whole dispute mechanism in the NAFTA agreement into question.

Surely, when the Americans can agree to the softwood deal and the Conservatives can capitulate to the tactics that they have shown on this, when every international softwood panel has found in favour of Canada and yet we sell out to the American interests on this, it puts into question each and every trade agreement that we have under NAFTA. It certainly destroys the myth that there was a dispute mechanism through NAFTA.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Guy André (Berthier—Maskinongé, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I am naturally very pleased to speak here today at the report stage of Bill C-24, the Softwood Lumber Products Export Charge Act, 2006.

I would like to begin my speech by making a few comments on the motions we are studying today. There are a number of them. Many of the motions were moved by the NDP—a party that is not

comfortable with this agreement—some by the government, the Liberals and the Bloc Québécois.

We examined these motions and we conducted a clause by clause study of this bill. We would have preferred the bill to be amended to give a little more flexibility to the definition of “independent manufacturer” so as to allow more processed wood products to possibly be excluded from the agreement and therefore cross the border without restrictions.

We believe that the wording of this bill is too restrictive and prevents processed products from freely entering the United States. Had there been greater flexibility, the two signatory countries could have enforced the agreement with fewer restrictions and therefore could have increased the trade in secondary and tertiary processing products.

We feel that the future of our industry is especially dependent on its ability to develop new products and process them here. There will unfortunately be job losses if the forest industry continues exporting wooden planks that are eventually processed abroad.

In view of the act’s vagueness in this regard, we believe that this addition could have improved the way in which the bill before us today works—a bill, I remind the House, whose purpose is to implement the softwood lumber agreement reached last July 1 that laid out in particular the procedures for returning the countervailing and anti-dumping duties to the companies and established rules for the return of the billion dollars to Washington.

This legislation determines the barriers that will regulate the softwood lumber trade between Canada and the United States and establishes procedures for the federal government to return the export duties to Quebec and the Canadian provinces.

This bill does not specify how export quotas will be allotted. That will be done by regulation. The Quebec industry is concerned, and rightly so, that the agreement provides for these quotas to be allotted on a monthly basis. In the past, they were allotted quarterly. It would help our industry survive if the regulations could be more flexible.

It is important to remember that the construction industry is cyclical and lumber deliveries tend therefore to vary substantially from one month to another. Unfortunately, this issue still has not been resolved in the bill and the government has not made any specific promises. That is a cause for concern.

At best, the binational council responsible for overseeing the agreement will deal with this problem. We hope that the government will try through this binational council to make the monthly export ceilings more flexible.

It was on April 27, 2006 that the Government of Canada and the Bush administration announced the conclusion of a framework agreement settling the softwood lumber dispute. The agreement reached by the two countries on July 1, 2006 and finally signed last September 12 has led to Bill C-24, which is before us today.

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We have said on many occasions over the last few months that the Bloc Québécois will vote in favour of Bill C-24, but not very enthusiastically. We have consulted industry representatives and representatives of forest sector workers on this. The unions also asked us to support the agreement.

•(1615)

My colleagues in the NDP say they do not understand the position of the Bloc Québécois because it supports this agreement. We have spoken with experts, with those who are affected in Quebec, because we are ready to defend our industry and we are close to our unions, as the NDP should be in other provinces. Those people told us that it was time to get out; that they could not carry on any longer, they were bleeding to death. They needed an agreement; they needed to get back the countervailing duties as quickly as possible to try to get out of this crisis. Of course, this agreement does not put an end to the crisis, but we believe that, at this time, it is the best thing to do.

They said that, while the agreement was not satisfactory, they preferred to accept it rather than to continue to fight in the courts. There was no progress; there were negotiations, then no negotiations. The industry and the representatives of workers in Quebec asked us to support this agreement and that is what we are doing. To act otherwise would have been irresponsible.

It must be clearly understood that the Quebec and Canadian softwood lumber industry is in a very difficult situation. We know; we are all well aware that the forest industry was weakened by the softwood lumber dispute, and that it is now facing a structural crisis without precedent. The government must not think that by signing this agreement it has found a solution to the softwood lumber crisis.

Since April 2005, 8,700 jobs have been lost in the forest industry in Quebec. Of those 8,700 jobs, 2,850 are lost forever. The importance of a support program for older workers to make up for those lost jobs is becoming greater every day.

The companies that have survived are in serious financial difficulty. Equipment is not being replaced, investments are not being made and the competitive ability of these companies has been seriously affected. We must not forget that this situation also affects pulp and paper companies—of which there are many in the Trois-Rivières region—who are the owners of the sawmills that produce almost 80% of softwood lumber in Quebec.

In short, the forest industry, which is widespread in the Mauricie region and elsewhere in Quebec, no longer had the resources to continue to fight. The representatives of this sector told us that and they asked us to support this agreement.

There is reason to wonder whether the forest industry would have accepted this agreement if it had been in a stronger position. However, since the beginning of the dispute in May 2002, both the Liberal and Conservative governments refused to take action to ensure that the industry was in better financial health.

The Liberal and Conservative governments must assume their responsibilities and explain the very difficult situation in which our forest industry currently finds itself.

We hope that this agreement, which is very unsatisfactory for our industry—even though the industry and our unions in Quebec are asking us to support it because they have been bled white and cannot carry on because of a lack of support—will be a good lesson for the House because the Bloc Québécois has made many requests since I was elected in June 2004.

What did the Bloc Québécois ask of the Liberals over all those years? It asked for loan guarantees to support the companies and help them avoid bankruptcy; it asked for employment insurance to be relaxed and made more accessible; and it asked for an income support program for older workers. It asked for support for processing activities to provide new markets for Quebec's lumber, and it asked Ottawa to assume the onerous legal fees incurred by the companies that fell victim to legal harassment by the United States. Instead of that, under this agreement we are paying the fees incurred by the Americans.

The industry has structural problems and this softwood lumber agreement does not help to solve them. The president of the FTQ stated that along with this agreement, the Conservatives now have a duty to take concrete action to help the industry survive the major crisis it has been enduring for years now.

I will conclude by emphasizing that the Bloc Québécois would have preferred a return to free trade in all forest products as a way of settling the softwood lumber dispute, which continued for more than four years.

Unfortunately, though, that is not what this agreement provides for.

•(1620)

[*English*]

Mr. Wayne Marston (Hamilton East—Stoney Creek, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I know my hon. friend across the way quite well. When he expresses his distaste for this agreement, I understand that. However, the facts are the facts. This agreement would not be proceeding if it were not for the fact that the Bloc chose to support it. When the Bloc conferred with the community, what did the other industries say about the potential damages that they would be facing as a result of this agreement?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Guy André: Mr. Speaker, the Bloc Québécois is close to the Quebec industry and the unions.

When we consulted the key players in the forest industry, the softwood lumber industry in Quebec, they asked us to support this agreement, but to make certain amendments to it, which we did. The unions also asked us to do so.

That is why we are going ahead. Despite everything, I would like to tell our colleague that this agreement is the work of the parties in power—Conservative and Liberal—who turned a deaf ear for many years and refused to listen to an industry in difficulty that needed support.

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The government turned a deaf ear and eventually reached the point of no return. The government said it wanted to go ahead and recover a portion of the countervailing duties that had been paid, but only a portion. Only some of the money will be recovered. We will try to move forward and support our industries for a few years with this agreement and other programs. We hope that the government will put in place an action plan to support this industry, which still has many needs.

• (1625)

Mr. Gilles-A. Perron (Rivière-des-Mille-Îles, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I would like to congratulate my friend and colleague from Berthier—Maskinongé on his excellent speech.

It is a rather sombre speech. If I understand correctly, my colleague is not very enthusiastic about this agreement. I would like my colleague to tell me more. Will this ill-advised, incomplete agreement help the industry? Does he anticipate further cuts, more job losses or price increases? What do the paper mill manufacturers think about the agreement? I would like to hear his comments.

Mr. Guy André: Mr. Speaker, as I have already said, some of the countervailing duties, the money paid by our softwood lumber companies, will come back and will help the forest industry to breathe. But the industry is not yet out of the woods. We know that some companies have closed their doors in Quebec, and this has caused major job losses. Other action programs have to be put in place to support this industry in difficulty. This is why we hope that the government will set up an action plan to support the softwood lumber sector.

I also talked about monthly quotas, which are another problem. These quotas will have to be spread over a minimum of two or three months so as to respect our industries' capacity to export to the U.S. If a quota is for one month, an export quota that sets the delivery time for linear board, for example, and we cannot deliver what we are entitled to deliver, we will still have major difficulties. As far as regulations are concerned, adjustments and policies that are more advantageous to companies will be required.

[*English*]

Mr. Wayne Marston (Hamilton East—Stoney Creek, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I stand today to speak to Bill C-24, An Act to impose a charge on the export of certain softwood lumber products to the United States and a charge on refunds of certain duty deposits paid to the United States, to authorize certain payments, to amend the Export and Import Permits Act and to amend other Acts as a consequence. It is the part that states, "to amend other acts as a consequence", that caused the discussions that we had back in Hamilton.

When I ran for Parliament in the last election I made a pledge to my constituents that they would have, in this member, someone who would represent the people to the government and not necessarily the government to the people.

When my constituents saw the machinations in the House, and especially after hearing the stories of the issues our critic from Burnaby—New Westminster faced in committee, the obstruction and the ongoing problems of trying to get an honest dialogue going on this particular issue, the folks back in Hamilton East—Stoney Creek wanted to know how we reached such a point in time.

I will be gentle here because in the areas to which some of the members were speaking they were not using what I would refer to as kind language. They were referring to what I, in their stead, call rogues and scoundrels because I have done that in the House before. They want to know how this trend happened and how we arrived at this point in the House.

I have spoken to this before in the House. A prototype of the Avro Arrow was marched out earlier this year. It was a reminder to many Canadians. I was a young boy at the time of the Avro Arrow. All of us caught the spirit of that particular endeavour. Canada would be a leader in aircraft development in the world.

Some of us will recall that discussions were held with the government of Dwight D. Eisenhower around the Beaumark missile and significant pressure came about from that U.S. president. The Americans did not want us building this particular aircraft, even though Canada had five prototypes ready to go. As I said, we were in a position to take that leadership role.

In the opinion of the folks back in Hamilton East—Stoney Creek, that was the beginning of the change. They believed in the prime minister they had at the time, a prime minister who was a Progressive Conservative, Mr. John Diefenbaker. However, he caved in, and the day was known throughout the province of Ontario as black Friday because the heads of 15,000 families lost their employment. Sometimes both spouses worked at this particular plant and their futures were gone. Some were more fortunate than others. They were able to move to the United States and become involved with NASA.

Moving along from that, the trend that the folks back home are speaking about is that they saw that continue on. Many workers lived in Hamilton East—Stoney Creek and worked in manufacturing. Our area was the heartland of manufacturing.

What happened in the 1980s is that the discussions around free trade started taking place and the apprehension started to ripple through our community. A tentative draft agreement was signed on free trade in, I believe, 1988, and the very day it was signed, lo and behold, Firestone laid off 1,300 employees and closed its plant based on the fact that it could warehouse its materials now and did not need to manufacture in Canada any more.

I do not want the government today to believe I will only pick on Conservatives. I will not do that because part of the history of how we arrived at today has to be borne by the Liberal Party opposite. Prior to the Liberals being in government, when they were in search of power in 1993, they had advertisements in the newspapers, as many will recall, promising that there were some things that party just would not do. One of the things the Liberals promised they would not do was sign the NAFTA agreement. The other thing the Liberals said they would do is cancel the GST.

This is of particular note in Hamilton East because the member for Hamilton East ultimately had to resign her seat and run in a byelection as a result of that broken promise. A few short weeks after the 1993 election, the Liberals signed NAFTA. The people of Hamilton East—Stoney Creek have had doubts in their governments since those days and these doubts continue today.

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•(1630)

The people of Hamilton East—Stoney Creek watched the party opposite, when it was in government, break promise after promise.

Following the last election, a member, who was elected to the House as a Liberal and who had held the portfolio that negotiated and worked on the softwood lumber deal, crossed the House to the government side. We heard not nice words said about that earlier today, which I will not repeat in the House, but we have to wonder how the people in that member's riding felt when they elected a Liberal and woke up to a Conservative. I guess they would have a certain sense of betrayal, which, I guess, follows through when people are looking at this particular deal negotiated by that individual. Many people have used the word betrayal when they talk about this particular agreement.

I would like to refer to some dates that are quite important. The hardest day to look at is late on Canada Day when the Prime Minister announced that the government had agreed with the United States to a final text on the settlement of the softwood lumber dispute. To announce that on Canada Day, and add insult to injury to the people who worked in that industry, is beyond belief.

We go on a little later and we find that on August 22 the government announced that the provinces of B.C. and Ontario were in support of this agreement, that it would be tabling enabling legislation in the fall when Parliament reconvened and that it would be a confidence vote.

Here is where we get into the area that I know concerns our friends in the Bloc. At that point the pressures came to bear on them. I still have difficulty with this coming from a community with other industries that I know will be affected by this, but the Bloc chose, because of the pressures applied to it, to support the government and move this legislation forward. When we look back in history I think it will be seen as a mistake. I am sure that the members opposite would debate me on that point at this point in time.

As a result of that support from the Bloc, on October 12 the softwood lumber agreement, as amended secretly by two governments, entered into force. The Standing Committee on International Trade conducted one day of hearings on Bill C-24 and refused to accommodate any additional witnesses, including many groups, such as first nations and trade unions that wanted to be heard. Only the NDP presented witnesses for the hearings at that stage.

Earlier I asked how it was that the Liberal Party helped blocked those hearings, hearings that should have gone across our country.

In conclusion, I want to mention the giveaway of \$500 million in funds owned by the Canadian softwood industry to subsidize the U.S. Coalition for Fair Lumber Imports. By whose definition is that fair?

The agreement has no stability. It can be cancelled unilaterally at any time and it does not provide stability or predictability in our Canadian industry. As we have heard before in the House, it kills any credibility of the NAFTA dispute settlement mechanism, which would have ensured a full refund if we had allowed it to run its course.

It has also been stated that we have won court case after court case. Why in the world did we need to negotiate on our knees? This is a precedent that will damage manufacturing across our country and it is a total sellout.

•(1635)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): 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 Don Valley East, Income Trusts.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Gilles-A. Perron (Rivière-des-Mille-Îles, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I would almost like my colleague from the New Democratic Party, who has just spoken, to take back his words. He said some inappropriate and false things.

Yes, the Bloc Québécois was pressured, but the pressure to support Bill C-24 did not come from the political environment. This pressure came from the business community, from the people who own sawmills and paper manufacturing plants. Besides these businesspeople, the unions unanimously asked the Bloc Québécois to support this agreement, which is not all that good, but which for them is a question of survival.

My question is as follows. What would the member opposite have done if the people from the steel sector in the Hamilton region, that is, the workers, union leaders and employers, had put pressure on him to support a bill that, in his opinion, was not right? What would he have decided in such a situation?

•(1640)

[*English*]

Mr. Wayne Marston: Mr. Speaker, I was not making any suggestion that the Bloc was blackmailed or anything else by the government. I was referring to the pressures that Bloc members had received from their communities and the unions to which the member referred. There may have been some misunderstanding but it certainly was not as it seems to have come across to the hon. member.

As to what would happen in our community if we were to be lobbied in the same way, the member makes the question too easy for me in the sense that it would be easy for me to stand up and say that yes, I would stand up and fight and I would do this and that.

In fairness to your question, without being in that situation it is very difficult to respond as to what we would do at that point in time. I would like to think that the conclusion we would reach is that it is a bad deal and we would not support it.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): Before I recognize the next questioner, I would like to advise the hon. member for Hamilton East—Stoney Creek to address his comments through the Chair, in the third person and all that.

The hon. member for Trinity—Spadina.

Ms. Olivia Chow (Trinity—Spadina, NDP): Mr. Speaker, we know that 10,000 Quebec forestry worker jobs have been lost in recent years. These 10,000 forestry workers have not been consulted. They have not been asked as to whether there should be—

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Mr. Gilles-A. Perron: Baloney. You're lying. They've been consulted.

Ms. Olivia Chow: Allow me to finish.

The 10,000 forestry workers were not consulted regarding this agreement. We know that the 1,500 Canadian softwood companies that were slapped with punitive taxes by U.S. customs were not consulted.

The minister initially consulted with a core group of 25 large softwood companies and the consultation was kept secret. Subsequently, a letter of invitation was mailed to a total of 300 companies but smaller businesses were never consulted. The list of the 300 companies has not been made public and many witnesses, who were invited by the NDP and other opposition parties to appear at the committee hearings, confirmed that they were excluded. Even the Governments of Saskatchewan and Manitoba were not really consulted.

I have a question for the Hamilton East—Stoney Creek. Would his constituents be interested in being consulted on the \$1 billion that were left at the table and which belong to Canadian taxpayers and Canadian companies? Would the member like to perhaps talk to his constituents as to how many ways that \$1 billion can be spent?

Mr. Wayne Marston: Mr. Speaker, the one thing I know about the history of Hamilton, Hamilton East and Stoney Creek as well is that the workers there are a group of people who want to be heard. When I return home I listen to them discussing the fact that the hearings—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): Resuming debate, the hon. member for Trinity—Spadina.

Ms. Olivia Chow (Trinity—Spadina, NDP): Mr. Speaker, there is a famous song that asks, if I had a million dollars, what would I do with a million dollars? I want the House to think about what we would do if we had \$1 billion. It is really quite tragic that Canada caved in at a moment of strength, given that international rulings continued to land firmly on our side.

This deal will kill the NAFTA process which has favoured Canada's position and forfeited at least \$1 billion plus hundreds of millions dollars more in interest that would have come our way had our negotiators hung tough.

On April 7 the United States Court of International Trade ruled that the U.S. industry was entitled legally to no money, not a penny, none of it. Well, 20 days later the U.S. coalition was offered a deal to take \$500 million. Of course they said yes. Of course they would want the \$500 million because they were not entitled to one penny and yet they got \$500 million. That is a really good deal for them.

Second, the net present value at the end of April was not the same as it was at Christmas especially as the pot kept growing. We talked about the \$500 million but there was more. Actually, \$450 million would go to some kind of meritorious initiatives in the United States. Why? How? Why is Canada providing foreign aid to the United States? Is the United States poor? Is it desperate? Is it in need of financial support? Are U.S. citizens suffering from AIDS and have no funds to pay for medication? Maybe the people are poor, but the government is not poor. Are the Americans suffering from bad water, dirty water, and they have no funds to clean their water? They must

be desperate. That is probably why our minister gave \$450 million directly to the President, not to congress. I do not quite understand it. This is a lot of money.

Not only is the \$500 million going to the coalition, but it is Canadian money that is going to the President himself. Congress will not be involved in any way with this agreement. The Government of Canada is making a gift of \$450 million to the President of the U.S. Perhaps this is the price of friendship between Canadian prime ministers and U.S. presidents. It is not the first time.

We have a nasty habit of prime ministers wanting to do everything to please presidents of the United States of America. Last year in the summer I recall that the former prime minister committed Canadian troops to go south in Afghanistan just before he visited the United States President. This time we are giving the Americans \$1 billion.

The U.S. consumer lobby was shocked by this deal. The American consumer group could not believe it. American consumers for affordable homes claims to represent 95% of U.S. lumber consumption. It is especially shocked by the fact that \$1 billion of the \$5 billion collected by the U.S. government will not be returned to Canada despite the fact that we kept winning all the trade deals in the courts. That lobby group reports that \$1 billion will be put into two funds and the lobby cites statistics of the U.S. census bureau that show that higher lumber prices will result because the tariffs have priced 300,000 Americans out of the market for new homes. That is also the impact of this agreement.

Imagine what we could do with \$1 billion. I asked students just a few minutes ago and they said it would be really useful to invest in some training programs.

● (1645)

What about some English language training for new migrant workers? What about helping some new immigrants to get certification and employment opportunities in areas of need, such as nurses, doctors, et cetera, especially in our northern communities and communities where a lot of lumber is being cut and where there is a lot of unemployment. It would be wonderful to have some money for training.

It would also be wonderful if there was some money for transportation and infrastructure in order to reduce energy costs, perhaps some community centres for young people, or some grants for arts and culture and some workshops.

Within three minutes the students were able to think of at least seven to eight different ways on how to spend the billion dollars. It is so sad knowing how many forestry workers have lost their jobs recently. As I said earlier, in Quebec alone almost 10,000 forestry workers have lost their jobs in recent years. Will they get any of this \$1 billion? No, because this \$1 billion has gone completely to the United States.

We know that because of this deal we will have significant job losses. Why? Because this deal will discourage Canadian value added production. It will stimulate raw log exports rather than having the logs dealt with here and creating jobs in Canada. This deal does nothing to protect that. Because of the quotas and export taxes producers will not be hiring workers back if they do not see any room for expansion in the future.

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The Québec Forest Industry Council said that there will be massive restructuring or layoffs. The Ontario Forest Industry Association said that there will be shuttered mills and unemployment, and that about 20% of the mills could close as a result of the policies of this government.

This deal is bad for the industry. It is bad for Canadian taxpayers. It is bad for a lot of towns and it is certainly not good for this government to accept it.

Last, it is fatally flawed because there is no democratic process. As I said earlier, there was no process where the majority of these companies were consulted. Certainly, most of the companies that must now pay this tariff were not consulted. Only the very big companies and a percentage of the 300 small businesses were consulted, the rest were not.

I urge members to take a close look at this and vote with their hearts and not support this deal.

•(1650)

Mr. Laurie Hawn (Edmonton Centre, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I listened with interest to my hon. colleague and she loves to sing songs. I will get to that in a second. However, a big part of the downturn in employment in the industry might have something to do with the fact that housing has slowed down considerably and people simply are not buying lumber.

She loves to sing the song about “If I had a billion dollars”. She comes from the “glass 20% empty” club. We, and the Bloc, and I think a lot of other members in the House come from the “glass 80% full” club. So, when she is making up songs, I wonder if she would mind making one up that says something like, “If I had \$4 billion what would I do?”

Does the hon. member have any idea what the workers and the companies are doing with the \$4 billion that they have now because of the good work of this government?

Ms. Olivia Chow: Mr. Speaker, there are a lot of things that I am good at and singing is not one of them.

I did not know there is a housing slowdown. If I look at my own city, there is a housing boom. In the last five to eight years there have been many condominiums and houses built all across the greater Toronto area. Certainly, there is no shortage of builders in need of workers and lumber. I do not understand where this is coming from. What does the member mean that there is a housing slowdown? I have not noticed that there is one.

The other thing that we know is that we are entitled to \$5 billion. We know that especially after a court decision that was so clear. It was not the first or second decision. There has been court decision after court decision that has said the \$5 billion belonged to Canadians. It does not belong to the bullies. The coalitions have been bullying us and we are now paying money to the bullies. This is their reward for bullying us. That does not make any sense whatsoever.

Really, we are rewarding them with \$500 million for causing our lumber industry to suffer and layoff workers over the years. Instead of pushing back, we give up and say, “Thank you for bullying us,

take this \$500 million and take the \$450 million for your President who has given you so much strength to bully Canadians”.

•(1655)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Gilles-A. Perron (Rivière-des-Mille-Îles, BQ): I have a comment for my colleague opposite. She said there is a housing boom. In Ottawa the buildings and condominiums going up are made of concrete. She should have come out of her cocoon in Toronto for a while and gone to Kapuskasing, Timmins, Englehart, Swastika, New Liskeard, Cobalt and Tri-City, to see how many houses were built this year in those towns. She also could have come to Abitibi, to Rouyn-Noranda, Amos, La Sarre, Mont-Laurier, to my riding of Rivière-des-Mille-Îles and to Saint-Eustache.

How many houses were built of wood this year? There is a housing slowdown.

In my opinion, my colleague should take the time to assess the rate of construction in Quebec and Ontario before making comments or saying that we have not consulted our people.

[*English*]

Ms. Olivia Chow: Mr. Speaker, I certainly believe in consultation, unlike other members in the House who do not. Most Canadians are suffering through it.

No, it is not just Toronto. It is also Vancouver and Ottawa. Many big cities are in fact having a housing boom. I know why there is no housing boom in many small towns. I visited Thunder Bay recently and its lumber companies are going bankrupt. They are going bankrupt because they have been harassed year after year due to the softwood lumber trade.

In the towns the hon. member was talking about even Domtar has closed down its shop and is laying off forestry workers. That is why these towns are having trouble. The workers are really having difficulty. They are in their forties and have—

The Deputy Speaker: I am sorry to interrupt the hon. member for Trinity—Spadina but her time has expired. I now recognize the hon. member for British Columbia Southern Interior.

Mr. Alex Atamanenko (British Columbia Southern Interior, NDP): Mr. Speaker, Bill C-24 is a sellout. It is another example of a decision made to appease our American friends.

What are some of the points?

It is based on the falsehood that Canadian softwood lumber industries are subsidized. That is not the case.

It gives away \$500 million in funds owned by the Canadian softwood lumber industry to subsidize the U.S. Coalition for Fair Lumber Imports. That does not sound right.

It provides \$450 million in funds to the administration of the United States, which will be used at its discretion, without Congress approval and accountability.

Government Orders

It can be cancelled unilaterally at any time, which does not provide stability and predictability to the Canadian softwood industry.

There are other points. I will go on a bit more about them later.

[*Translation*]

Our Prime Minister betrayed the workers in Canada's forestry sector. The government gave up a billion dollars to Washington. Now the Bush administration will have its say in how our forestry industry is managed.

Furthermore, an agreement was reached without any real opportunity for true, open and transparent debate on the issue. This also reminds me of what is happening to the Canadian Wheat Board.

• (1700)

[*English*]

The proposed dismantling of Wheat Board single desk is much the same chain of events. For a long time the Americans have wanted to see this happen. It is just another example in a series of sellouts of our Canadian sovereignty.

This does not surprise me in light of the context of what we call the proposed North American union. If we look at this, we can see why this is happening. We can see that there is no doubt that there is a proposed takeover of Canada by the Security and Prosperity Partnership of North America, a deal through which we are being led by increments into what is called the North American union.

The SPP, the Security and Prosperity Partnership, was launched in March 2005 as a trilateral initiative to fast-track this deep integration of Canada, Mexico and the U.S. through the harmonization of 300 common areas of legislation and regulations. Discussions on plans for continental integration went underground once the member for LaSalle—Émard, Vicente Fox and George Bush signed the agreement in March 2005.

And now we see officials from Canada, Mexico and the U.S., former ministers from previous Liberal governments, North America's top corporate executives, and top Canadian and U.S. military brass, meeting in secret at the executive Fairmont in Banff a little while ago, in September, as sanctioned by the Canadian Council of Chief Executives. No media or general public from any of the three countries were informed about or invited to this meeting. The government has refused to release any information.

At the same time, we are seeing ourselves bullied into signing the softwood lumber deal, which, within only a few days of signing, has resulted in the loss of 2,500 jobs, with many more on the way. I had feedback on this in my riding when I was there just a few days ago.

We are witnessing a movement toward a Canadian military economy, based on the American model and fashioned after the U.S., as we divert billions of tax dollars to the military-industrial complex to spend on hardware to fight the wrong mission in Afghanistan.

As I mentioned earlier, we are witnessing a blatant attempt to destroy the Canadian Wheat Board, a great Canadian success story, for the benefit of multinational corporations that now control 80% of the world's grain trade.

The pattern is here. We have to wonder where democracy factors into all of this and why there is all this secrecy among all of those powerful people. Under this proposal, what would a North American union look like? Would the wages of the workers in Mexico be brought up to the level of the minimum wages we enjoy in Canada, or would it be the other way around? Will the U.S. finally develop a universal health care system for citizens? Or will we adopt its system? Will we create a new currency or adopt the U.S. dollar? What will the new union flag look like flying along the NAFTA superhighway as they build the four lanes from Mexico to Alaska?

Once again, I suspect that all of these deals, step by step, are in a series of steps in a recipe for lower standards and a lower quality of life in many areas such as food security, air safety, environmental norms, health care, labour and human rights. All of these are issues that our party is trying to stand up for and fight for on behalf of average Canadians. Canadians have a right to decide whether these plans for merging our three countries are really in the best interests of anyone who has not been invited to those meetings.

Let us continue and look at some of the aspects of the softwood lumber agreement. It constrains trade unreasonably by applying punitive tariffs and quotas that hinder the flexibility of the Canadian softwood industry. This deal infringes on provincial constitutional prerogatives, by both Ottawa and Washington.

What is most important is that it kills the credibility of the NAFTA dispute settlement mechanism, which would have ensured the full refund of the money illegally collected. What does that do? It sets a precedent for other industries and other aspects of society that challenge the rules of the NAFTA process. It sets a bad precedent not only for softwood lumber but also for the whole industrial sector in Canada.

• (1705)

It fits in with framework that I have just talked about with this supposed or proposed North American union. What does it do for the thousands of workers who have lost their livelihoods over the past five years? Would this potentially trigger significant job losses through further consolidation caused by the quotas and export taxes which would cap market access and growth?

The agreement also forces further downsizing of the Canadian softwood industry, with the accompanying huge impact on softwood communities throughout Canada. We are experiencing that in my riding of British Columbia Southern Interior, where things are becoming more difficult and jobs are being lost in spite of this agreement.

The agreement discriminates against Canadian companies that refuse to sign on by resorting to bullying and fiscal arm-twisting.

I could go on and on. I see this as one of the steps that is the same as the proposed dismantling of our Canadian Wheat Board or the threat that might be there on supply management. Apparently there is not, but we think there is. It is all in regard to the whole idea of this North American union and the potential loss of our sovereignty. For this reason, I oppose this deal.

Government Orders

Mr. Wayne Marston (Hamilton East—Stoney Creek, NDP): Mr. Speaker, hearing the words “continental integration” made me want to bound to my feet in the middle of my friend's speech, because in the 1980s when we were fighting the free trade agreement one of the issues we were fighting for was the issue of trying to avoid continental integration.

When we read that this agreement infringes on provincial constitutional prerogatives by both Ottawa and Washington and that the anti-circumvention clause allows Washington a right to oversight of and veto power over Canadian forestry practices, I ask the member this: how in the world does he figure that a sovereignist Bloc could have supported this agreement when it is a blatant attack on sovereignty?

Mr. Alex Atamanenko: Mr. Speaker, I do not know how anyone could support this deal. It is not a good deal, especially for those of us who are here to try to represent workers, working communities and working families. I think it is a bad deal.

Ms. Chris Charlton (Hamilton Mountain, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I have a question for my colleague from B.C. His community is obviously profoundly affected by the forestry industry. I am from Steeltown. I am from Hamilton. My riding is Hamilton Mountain. We obviously have huge concerns about what trade deals are doing to industries right around the country.

Yet for this deal, which has such a profound impact on his community, his home province and many other provinces such as Quebec, for example, and provinces right across our country, workers in these communities were not able to actually voice their concerns to the government. All 308 members in the House have committed to take on the concerns of our constituents and voice them in the House and to take our responsibilities seriously. I will bet that the member had many people in his community coming to his community office and wanting to participate in public hearings and make their voices heard.

They are now doing it through him, but I bet those people would have really liked an opportunity to participate in official committee hearings that travelled from community to community. Then all of us could have learned from the experts, not only about how the implementation of trade deals like this one is impacting the forestry industry in those communities, but how it might also ultimately affect communities like mine in Hamilton.

Mr. Alex Atamanenko: Mr. Speaker, because we did not have the opportunity to have these hearings, which would have been the way to go, as the member mentioned, what I did was take a poll of the industry and the local government in my area, including the mayors and regional directors.

The vast majority said no, the deal was bad. Those who said yes to the deal also said that they had a gun to their heads and had no choice but to accept it. Another one said, “I have no choice, but on principle I am not going to accept it”. That person thanked me very much for standing up to it.

Mr. Pat Martin (Winnipeg Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I was most taken with my colleague's remarks when he drew the connection between what the new Conservative government is doing regarding the softwood lumber deal and this mad crusade that it is on to dismantle the Canadian Wheat Board.

I would like the member to expand on his comments. I believe he was saying that these are two serious trade irritants to the Americans and that the Conservatives are doing the Americans' dirty work. Could the member expand on what he meant by bringing the Canadian Wheat Board into this debate on Canadian softwood lumber?

• (1710)

Mr. Alex Atamanenko: Mr. Speaker, it is no secret. There is pressure, internationally, for us to dismantle the way we do things in Canada. The duties put on softwood lumber are as a result of how we do business in Canada. In British Columbia we have had to change. We are trying to scramble to try to meet the Americans' expectations with regard to stumpage.

The Canadian Wheat Board is another example. It is a threat to how we do things in Canada. The pressure is there from the large American companies that want to open up businesses in Canada. This fits in very much with that philosophy and the whole idea of Canadian sovereignty, about which I talked.

Ms. Jean Crowder (Nanaimo—Cowichan, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased today to speak in support of the good work that my colleague, the member for Burnaby—New Westminster, has done on highlighting the challenges with the bill.

The member had put together 25 reasons why the House, as Canadian parliamentarians, should not support the bill. I will not read all 25 of them, but there are a couple I want to highlight.

One is it gives away \$500 million in funds owned by the Canadian softwood industry to subsidize the U.S. Coalition for Fair Lumber Imports. This coalition is the Canadian industry's main competitor. Everybody fully expects it to use this money to fund its next round on why the Canadian lumber industry is unfair to coalition members.

The deal can also be cancelled unilaterally at any time. It does not provide stability and predictability to the Canadian softwood industry. In basic terms, this agreement can be terminated unilaterally after 18 months without cause or explanation. The agreement can be terminated immediately by the Americans if they feel Canada has not complied with the terms of the agreement.

This leads me to a really important reason why we should oppose this. It infringes on provincial constitutional prerogatives by both Ottawa and Washington.

We do not want to have any kind of foreign oversight on our lumber industry in British Columbia. The softwood lumber industry in British Columbia is a critical element in our economic prosperity. We do not want somebody from outside telling us how to run our lumber industry.

The agreement does nothing for thousands of workers who have lost their livelihoods over the past five years. It will also potentially trigger significant job losses through further consolidation caused by quotas and export taxes which could cap market access and growth.

It is on these two points that I want to spend some time.

Government Orders

Back on October 13 the member for Burnaby—New Westminster issued a press release about 2,500 jobs lost in the softwood sellout and more to come. In the press release he talked about these job losses on the first six days after this agreement was announced and predicted there would be ongoing job losses.

Just recently, on November 16, Western Forest Products announced that it would be shutting down a mill in New Westminster. One of the offshoots of this is we know that some of these logs will be shipped south of the border as raw log exports and will have no benefit whatsoever to our local communities. I wish to read this quote from the United Steel Workers Western Canada director, Stephen Hunt, about the company's decision to close the mill. This encapsulates what we are seeing. He said:

It's crazy. It's like having food for nine kids, feeding eight and selling the last one's cheeseburger out from under him. When a company is given access to enough of our trees to run a mill and is still allowed to close it down, there is something very wrong in this province.

We have seen that happen so many times in British Columbia. This is just the last in a long line of mill closures. Ninety-five per cent of the land in British Columbia is Crown land. That means it is owned by the citizens of British Columbia. Surely in any other enterprise we would say that the beneficiaries of a publicly owned facility or any other owned facility would come back to the owners. We would say that the owners should receive direct benefits from that.

In British Columbia we are allowing, and the softwood lumber agreement exacerbates this, our resources to be shipped out of the province to be processed somewhere else with no direct benefit to the people there.

Let us talk about dollars and cents just for one moment. If we mill those logs close to home and if we look at secondary and tertiary manufacturing, we actually contribute to a tax base.

• (1715)

We cannot reduce everything to dollars and cents, but we certainly know that when we have mills operating in our local communities, we employ workers and they paid their taxes. This means we can continue to pave our roads and pay for our school taxes and all the other good benefits that come from good paying jobs in communities. Not only that, there are spinoff jobs. There are truck drivers, caterers, cleaners and mill repair companies. All those jobs stay in our community when we process the logs close to home. However, what we are doing is shipping the logs somewhere else for processing.

I know I have talked about Youbou a number of times in the House, but in this last ditch effort to hold back the softwood lumber agreement, it is incumbent upon me to remind people what happens to a community when we close down a significant operation. This is the Youbou story. It is an abridged edition. I would love to read the whole thing, but it is called "The Last Hurrah". It is an article written by Keith Dickens shortly after the mill closure. It says:

On Friday, 26th January 2001 at 3:10 p.m. the last log was cut in Timberwests Youbou Sawmill. The thirty-six foot long fir log brought to a close seventy three years of continuous production at the Youbou plant and a proud sawmilling history for the communities of Youbou and Lake Cowichan. As the last moments approached a radio call was relayed throughout the plant, it simply said, "Last Log." This was the signal for virtually every employee to gather around 'A' Mills, 42ft Carriage...

We are talking about 73 years. We are talking about generations. When I met with some of the Youbou sawmill workers, they told me about how their fathers, their brothers, sometimes their grandfathers had worked in this mill. It had been a proud tradition in the Youbou community, 73 years worth of proud tradition, and the company that it was closing its doors. One of the reasons it closed was because of raw log exports.

The article goes on to say that TimberWest wanted to close the mill so it could increase its raw log exports. After the mill closed, local citizens staged a log truck count to track the number of trucks leaving the Cowichan valley. Over four days, 450 full logging trucks were tallied. This represented about 9,000 cubic metres per day, or 1.8 million cubic metres per year, enough to keep a good sized mill running for between three and four years and provide 200 well paid sawmill jobs and probably 400 to 600 jobs in spinoff industries. Put another way, over a three year period, these jobs could have put as much as \$19 million into the local economy.

We often have a tendency often to boil everything down into dollars and cents. We talk about the bottom line and about profit and loss. What we fail to talk about is the impact that this kind of sawmill closure has on people's lives. We had people who had worked at that mill for 25 or 30 years, and all of a sudden they were turfed out. To many of them, it was their whole life's work. It was their proud tradition to have worked in that sawmill.

I talked to these workers a couple of years later, and I continue to have ongoing conversations with some of them. Some of them have never gone back to full time, full year employment. Not only did we destroy the sawmill workers hopes and dreams for their future, but we also took apart their families. Some of these workers had to travel to other communities for work. Some of them have been unable to find steady work. We have not found a way to measure in dollars and cents the impact on these people's lives.

One thing I did not talk about was the lack of first nations, Métis and Inuit consultation in this process. It is another very good reason why we should not support Bill C-24. We should turn it back to the committee. We should ask it to do further investigation and a much more extensive consultation with the communities that are affected.

I urge each and every member of the House to vote against this flawed legislation. Let us do the good work we need to do to protect our forestry industry, our workers and our communities.

Government Orders

● (1720)

Ms. Chris Charlton (Hamilton Mountain, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I do not have very much to add because the member for Nanaimo—Cowichan always does such an exceptional job of putting her case completely. However, for some people, who have been watching this debate this afternoon, it must seem kind of odd that I and my colleagues, the member for Hamilton East—Stoney Creek and the member for Trinity—Spadina would speak to the bill and we feel so passionately about it when we do not have the forestry industry in our communities. Yet this bill matters profoundly and it should matter to everyone across the country. It not only affect the forestry, but it is also a harbinger of what is to come for other industries, as we have talked about before in the House, like the steel industry in my community of Hamilton.

Also there is a \$1 billion opportunity cost that we have just squandered when the government cut programs such as literacy and SCPI. What that means for a community like Hamilton, for homelessness initiatives, is just devastating.

We need to ensure that we look at this deal closely. I would encourage all members of the House to reconsider their vote, to stand up for their communities, to do right by the workers and their families and for all the programs that are on the chopping block. We have just given \$1 billion Canadian away.

Could the member comment not just on the impact of this deal on the forestry sector, on those workers, but also on the opportunity costs that the deal entails?

Ms. Jean Crowder: Mr. Speaker, what the member for Hamilton Mountain addresses is the great failing by both the current Conservative government and the former Liberal government.

I can hear an echo in the background that at one time would have talked about shipbuilding. The member for Sackville—Eastern Shore would certainly talk about the fact that we are lacking a credible industrial strategy from coast to coast to coast. We do not have a credible industrial strategy that talks about the forestry sector, or the auto sector or shipbuilding.

The country has had a proud tradition of not only using its raw resources, but also of manufacturing its raw resources. This is a vital element of how we keep our economy healthy and whole.

Hon. Chuck Strahl (Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food and Minister for the Canadian Wheat Board, CPC): Mr. Speaker, would the hon. member comment how she would react to the fact that the Quebec labour unions are in favour of this agreement and she is not?

Ms. Jean Crowder: Mr. Speaker, this is a broad and vast country. One of the benefits of our country is that we are allowed to have different opinions.

The United Steelworkers, which has representation across the country and in British Columbia, has asked us to vote against this agreement. It has made a number of suggestions about how we need to take a look at softwood lumber. One of them is that we should immediately withdraw support for the Prime Minister-Bush softwood deal. It also suggests that we should curb log exports, equalize the Mexican export log prices through an equivalency tax to dramatically increase the cost of exporting raw logs, that we should

have a reinvestment fund, which is earmarked to recoup softwood duties and revenue from the export tax for investment, and that we should have a new social contract that reinstates the fact that we use our resources closer to home.

Just as the member could pull one group out of a hat that says it supports the softwood agreement, I can pull another group out of the hat that is absolutely opposed to the softwood lumber agreement, saying it is bad for communities, bad for workers and bad for industry.

● (1725)

Mr. Wayne Marston (Hamilton East—Stoney Creek, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am proud to stand today with the member for Hamilton Mountain. There is the reality out there that people may be asking why people from Steeltown would stand up.

This agreement sets a bad precedent for softwood lumber, but it certainly will set a bad precedent for the rest of Canada, the rest of the manufacturing industry in fact, like in Hamilton.

Ms. Jean Crowder: Mr. Speaker, it is absolutely appropriate that people from Hamilton are speaking against the softwood lumber agreement. I have said it once, I have said it twice and I will say it many more times. I call upon the House to develop an industrial strategy that takes a look at us keeping good manufacturing jobs in our country, good processing jobs across a variety of sectors.

The people from Hamilton would be very pleased to see the House stand up and protect our industry and talk about what is good for it and good for our workers and communities. I think it would be incumbent on us to take those kinds of initiatives and protect those good paying jobs.

Mr. Pat Martin (Winnipeg Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I want to take the opportunity in the final minutes of this debate today on the amendments to Bill C-24 to, if nothing else, recognize and pay tribute to my colleague, the hon. member for Burnaby—New Westminster, who on behalf of all Canadians has done a valiant job in representing their interests in the face of this appallingly bad trade deal that sells out Canadians.

I do not think it has been raised enough here today. The House has probably heard a number of reasons why the NDP is opposed to this bill, but I do not think Canadians realize how the member for Burnaby—New Westminster was muzzled in committee, and blocked and barred from bringing these important issues where they properly belonged, which was at the House of Commons standing committee studying Bill C-24.

I have never seen anything like it. The tricks and stunts that the committee, in cooperation with Conservative, Liberal and Bloc members, pulled to unilaterally and undemocratically silence our colleague at committee should be noted here. I believe sanctions should in fact be brought to bear because members ganged up on him, muzzled him and reduced his time.

Let me explain what they did. They were in a televised room where committees are often heard, so that the general public can follow these meetings, and they turned off the cameras. They said they would not have it televised because they thought the NDP member was going to be speaking at some length on many of these amendments and the clause by clause analysis of the bill. That is what committee members are supposed to do. That is what good opposition MPs do in a clause by clause analysis of a bill.

The first thing they did was turn off the cameras. Then I believe, against the rules of the House and I will try to make that case in another place, they arbitrarily limited his speaking time to three minutes per clause. This is a bill of such complexity that most lawyers would have a hard time getting their minds around it. Most lay people, who may take an interest at home or at a sawmill where they work and have a vested interest in this bill, would really struggle to try to understand aspects of this bill within a few minutes.

That was not good enough. They then slammed his speaking time down to one minute per clause. This is all by some cooperation with the other three parties trying to muzzle and silence the valiant attempt of this fourth party opposition member. There is only one member on that committee from the NDP. He alone was fighting the good fight on behalf of Canadians and they conspired to silence him.

Time does not permit for me to—

The Deputy Speaker: I must agree that time does not permit the hon. member to continue as it has expired.

* * *

[Translation]

JUDGES ACT

The House resumed from November 9 consideration of the motion that Bill C-17, An Act to amend the Judges Act and certain other Acts in relation to courts, be read the third time and passed.

The Deputy Speaker: It being 5:30 p.m., pursuant to order made Thursday, November 9, the House will now proceed to the taking of the deferred recorded division on the motion at third reading stage of Bill C-17.

Call in the members.

● (1800)

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

(Division No. 64)

YEAS

Members

Abbott	Ablonczy
Albrecht	Alghabra
Allen	Allison
Ambrose	Anders
Anderson	Angus
Atamanenko	Bagnell
Bains	Baird
Barnes	Batters
Beaumier	Bélangier
Bell (Vancouver Island North)	Bell (North Vancouver)
Bennett	Benoit
Bernier	Bevilacqua
Black	Blackburn

Blaikie	Blaney
Bonin	Boshcoff
Boucher	Breitkreuz
Brisson	Brown (Oakville)
Brown (Leeds—Grenville)	Brown (Barrie)
Bruinoooge	Byrne
Calkins	Cannan (Kelowna—Lake Country)
Cannon (Pontiac)	Casey
Casson	Chamberlain
Chan	Charlton
Chong	Chow
Christopherson	Clement
Comartin	Comuzzi
Cotler	Crowder
Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley)	Cullen (Etobicoke North)
Cummins	Cuzner
D'Amours	Davidson
Davies	Day
Del Mastro	Devolin
Dewar	Dhalla
Dosanjh	Doyle
Dykstra	Easter
Emerson	Epp
Eyking	Fast
Finley	Fitzpatrick
Flaherty	Fletcher
Fry	Galipeau
Gallant	Godfrey
Godin	Goldring
Goodale	Goodyear
Gourde	Graham
Grewal	Guergis
Hanger	Harper
Harris	Harvey
Hawn	Hearn
Hiebert	Hill
Hinton	Holland
Hubbard	Jaffer
Jean	Jennings
Julian	Kadis
Kamp (Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge—Mission)	Karetak-Lindell
Karygiannis	Keddy (South Shore—St. Margaret's)
Keeper	Kenney (Calgary Southeast)
Khan	Komarnicki
Kramp (Prince Edward—Hastings)	Lake
Lauzon	Layton
LeBlanc	Lee
Lemieux	Lukiwski
Lunn	Lunney
MacAulay	MacKay (Central Nova)
MacKenzie	Malhi
Maloney	Manning
Mark	Marleau
Marston	Martin (Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca)
Martin (Winnipeg Centre)	Martin (LaSalle—Émard)
Martin (Sault Ste. Marie)	Mathysen
Matthews	Mayes
McCallum	McDonough
McGuinty	McGuire
McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood)	Menzies
Merasty	Merrifield
Mills	Minna
Moore (Port Moody—Westwood—Port Coquitlam)	
Moore (Fundy Royal)	
Murphy (Moncton—Riverview—Dieppe)	Murphy (Charlottetown)
Nash	Neville
Nicholson	Norlock
O'Connor	Obhrai
Oda	Pacetti
Pallister	Paradis
Patry	Peterson
Petit	Poilievre
Prentice	Preston
Priddy	Proulx
Ratansi	Redman
Regan	Reid
Richardson	Ritz
Robillard	Rodriguez
Rota	Russell
Savage	Savoie
Scarpalleggia	Scheer
Schellenberger	Scott
Sgro	Siksay
Simard	Simms

Government Orders

Skelton	Smith
Solberg	Sorenson
St. Amand	St. Denis
Stanton	Stoffer
Storseth	Strahl
Sweet	Szabo
Telegdi	Thibault (West Nova)
Thompson (New Brunswick Southwest)	Thompson (Wild Rose)
Tilson	Toews
Tonks	Trost
Turner	Tweed
Valley	Van Loan
Vellacott	Verner
Wallace	Wappel
Warawa	Warkentin
Wasylcia-Leis	Watson
Wilfert	Williams
Wilson	Wrzesnewskyj
Yelich	Zed— 230

NAYS

Members

André	Asselin
Bachand	Barbot
Bigras	Blais
Bonsant	Bouchard
Bourgeois	Brunelle
Cardin	Carrier
DeBellefeuille	Demers
Deschamps	Duceppe
Faille	Freeman
Gagnon	Gaudet
Gauthier	Guay
Guimond	Kotto
Laforest	Laframboise
Lavallée	Lemay
Lessard	Lévesque
Lussier	Malo
Ménard (Hochelega)	Mourani
Nadeau	Ouellet
Paquette	Perron
Picard	Roy
St-Cyr	St-Hilaire
Thibault (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques)— 43	

PAIRED

Members

Bellavance	Bezan
Carrie	Crête
Lalonde	Loubier
Miller	Plamondon
Rajotte	Shipley
Van Kesteren	Vincent— 12

The Speaker: I declare the motion carried.

(Bill read the third time and passed)

* * *

[English]

FEDERAL ACCOUNTABILITY ACT

The House resumed consideration of the motion, and of the amendment and of the amendment to the amendment.

The Speaker: Before the House proceeds to the deferred recorded divisions in relation to the motion respecting Senate amendments to Bill C-2, I wish to remind hon. members that the voting process is subject to a special order adopted by the House yesterday.

Pursuant to this order I have consulted with the parties and we will proceed as follows:

First, the subamendment will be the subject of one vote.

Second, if the subamendment is adopted, the amendment will be subject to two votes: one on part C and one on part D. However, if the subamendment is defeated, the amendment will be subject to four votes: the first one on part A, the second on part B, the third on part C and the fourth on part D.

Third, the main motion will be the subject of one vote.

[Translation]

I encourage all hon. members to prepare themselves accordingly.

[English]

The House will now proceed to the taking of the deferred recorded division on the subamendment in relation to the Senate amendments to Bill C-2.

The question is on the subamendment.

Mr. Jay Hill: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. There have been discussions among all the parties and I think if you were to seek it, you would find unanimous consent to apply the results of the vote just taken on the motion previously before the House to this motion, with Conservative members voting yes.

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Speaker: The hon. chief opposition whip.

Mrs. Karen Redman: Mr. Speaker, Liberals will be voting no.

• (1805)

[Translation]

Mr. Michel Guimond: Mr. Speaker, the members of the Bloc Québécois will vote in favour of this motion. I ask that you add the name of the hon. member for Marc-Aurèle-Fortin, who is now in the House.

Mr. Yvon Godin: Mr. Speaker, the members of the NDP will vote against this motion.

[English]

Mr. Garth Turner: Mr. Speaker, I vote yes.

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

(Division No. 65)

YEAS

Members

Abbott	Ablonczy
Albrecht	Allen
Allison	Ambrose
Anders	Anderson
André	Asselin
Bachand	Baird
Barbot	Batters
Benoit	Bernier
Bigras	Blackburn
Blais	Blaney
Bonsant	Bouchard
Boucher	Bourgeois
Breitkreuz	Brown (Leeds—Grenville)
Brown (Barrie)	Bruinooge
Brunelle	Calkins
Cannan (Kelowna—Lake Country)	Cannon (Pontiac)
Cardin	Carrier

Government Orders

Casey	Casson	Cotler	Crowder
Chong	Clement	Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley)	Cullen (Etobicoke North)
Cummins	Davidson	Cuzner	D'Amours
Day	DeBellefeuille	Davies	Devar
Del Mastro	Demers	Dhalla	Dosanjh
Deschamps	Devolin	Easter	Eyking
Doyle	Duceppe	Fry	Godfrey
Dykstra	Emerson	Godin	Goodale
Epp	Faille	Graham	Holland
Fast	Finley	Hubbard	Jennings
Fitzpatrick	Flaherty	Julian	Kadis
Fletcher	Freeman	Karetak-Lindell	Karygiannis
Gagnon	Galipeau	Keeper	Khan
Gallant	Gaudet	Layton	LeBlanc
Gauthier	Goldring	Lee	MacAulay
Goodyear	Gourde	Malhi	Maloney
Grewal	Guay	Marleau	Marston
Guergis	Guimond	Martin (Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca)	Martin (Winnipeg Centre)
Hanger	Harper	Martin (LaSalle—Émard)	Martin (Sault Ste. Marie)
Harris	Harvey	Mathysen	Matthews
Hawn	Hearn	McCallum	McDonough
Hiebert	Hill	McGuinty	McGuire
Hinton	Jaffer	McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood)	Merasty
Jean	Kamp (Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge—Mission)	Minna	Murphy (Moncton—Riverview—Dieppe)
Keddy (South Shore—St. Margaret's)	Kenney (Calgary Southeast)	Murphy (Charlottetown)	Nash
Komarnicki	Kotto	Neville	Pacetti
Kramp (Prince Edward—Hastings)	Laforest	Patry	Peterson
Laframboise	Lake	Priddy	Proulx
Lauzon	Lavallée	Ratansi	Redman
Lemay	Lemieux	Regan	Robillard
Lessard	Lévesque	Rodriguez	Rota
Lukiwski	Lunn	Russell	Savage
Lunney	Lussier	Savoie	Scarpaleggia
MacKay (Central Nova)	MacKenzie	Scott	Sgro
Malo	Manning	Siksay	Simard
Mark	Mayes	Simms	St. Amand
Ménard (Hochelega)	Ménard (Marc-Aurèle-Fortin)	St. Denis	Stoffer
Menzies	Merrifield	Szabo	Telegdi
Mills	Moore (Port Moody—Westwood—Port Coquitlam)	Thibault (West Nova)	Tonks
Moore (Fundy Royal)	Mourani	Valley	Wappel
Nadeau	Nicholson	Wasylycia-Leis	Wilfert
Norlock	O'Connor	Wilson	Wrzesnewskyj
Obhrai	Oda	Zed- — 111	
Ouellet	Pallister		
Paquette	Paradis		
Perron	Petit		
Picard	Poilievre		
Prentice	Preston		
Reid	Richardson		
Ritz	Roy		
Scheer	Schellenberger		
Skelton	Smith		
Solberg	Sorenson		
St-Cyr	St-Hilaire		
Stanton	Storseth		
Strahl	Sweet		
Thibault (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les Basques)			
Thompson (New Brunswick Southwest)			
Thompson (Wild Rose)	Tilson		
Toews	Trost		
Turner	Tweed		
Van Loan	Vellacott		
Verner	Wallace		
Warawa	Warkentin		
Watson	Williams		
Yelich- — 163			

NAYS

Members

Alghabra	Angus
Atamanenko	Bagnell
Bains	Barnes
Beaumier	Bélangier
Bell (Vancouver Island North)	Bell (North Vancouver)
Bennett	Bevilacqua
Black	Blaikie
Bonin	Boshcoff
Brison	Brown (Oakville)
Byrne	Chamberlain
Chan	Charlton
Chow	Christopherson
Comartin	Comuzzi

PAIRED

Members

Bellavance	Bezan
Carrie	Crête
Lalonde	Loubier
Miller	Plamondon
Rajotte	Shipley
Van Kesteren	Vincent- — 12

The Speaker: I declare the subamendment carried.

The next question is on the amendment, as amended.

Pursuant to order made on Monday, November 20, the votes on the paragraphs of the amendment will be dealt with separately. The next question is therefore on paragraph C of the amendment.

The hon. chief government whip.

Hon. Jay Hill: Mr. Speaker, that worked so well, let us try it again.

I think if you seek it, you will find the unanimous consent of the House to apply the results of the vote just taken to the motion presently before the House, with Conservative members present this evening voting no.

The Speaker: Does the hon. chief government whip have the unanimous consent of the House to proceed in this way?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

The Speaker: The hon. chief opposition whip.

Government Orders

Hon. Karen Redman: Mr. Speaker, Liberals will be voting yes.

[*Translation*]

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

[*English*]

Mr. Yvon Godin: Mr. Speaker, members of the NDP are voting no to this motion.

Hon. Garth Turner: Mr. Speaker, my vote is no.

(The House divided on paragraph C of the amendment, which was negated on the following division:)

(*Division No. 66*)

YEAS

Members

Alghabra	André
Asselin	Bachand
Bagnell	Bains
Barbot	Barnes
Beaumier	Bélanger
Bell (North Vancouver)	Bennett
Bevilacqua	Bigras
Blais	Bonin
Bonsant	Boshcoff
Bouchard	Bourgeois
Brison	Brown (Oakville)
Brunelle	Byrne
Cardin	Carrier
Chamberlain	Chan
Comuzzi	Cotler
Cullen (Etobicoke North)	Cuzner
D'Amours	DeBellefeuille
Demers	Deschamps
Dhalla	Dosanjh
Duceppe	Easter
Eyking	Faile
Freeman	Fry
Gagnon	Gaudet
Gauthier	Godfrey
Goodale	Graham
Guay	Guimond
Holland	Hubbard
Jennings	Kadis
Karetak-Lindell	Karygiannis
Keeper	Khan
Kotto	Laforest
Laframboise	Lavallée
LeBlanc	Lee
Lemay	Lessard
Lévesque	Lussier
MacAulay	Malhi
Malo	Maloney
Marleau	Martin (Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca)
Martin (LaSalle—Émard)	Matthews
McCallum	McGuinty
McGuire	McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood)
Ménard (Hochelaga)	Ménard (Marc-Aurèle-Fortin)
Merasty	Minna
Mourani	Murphy (Moncton—Riverview—Dieppe)
Murphy (Charlottetown)	Nadeau
Neville	Ouellet
Pacetti	Paquette
Patry	Perron
Peterson	Picard
Proulx	Ratansi
Redman	Regan
Robillard	Rodriguez
Rota	Roy
Russell	Savage
Scarpaleggia	Scott
Sgro	Simard
Simms	St-Cyr
St-Hilaire	St. Amand
St. Denis	Szabo

Telegdi
Basques)
Thibault (West Nova)
Valley
Wilfert
Wrzesnewskyj

Thibault (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les
Tonks
Wappel
Wilson
Zed— 128

NAYS

Members

Abbott	Ablonczy
Albrecht	Allen
Allison	Ambrose
Anders	Anderson
Angus	Atamanenko
Baird	Batters
Bell (Vancouver Island North)	Benoit
Bernier	Black
Blackburn	Blaikie
Blaney	Boucher
Breitkreuz	Brown (Leeds—Grenville)
Brown (Barrie)	Bruinooge
Calkins	Cannan (Kelowna—Lake Country)
Cannon (Pontiac)	Casey
Casson	Charlton
Chong	Chow
Christopherson	Clement
Comartin	Crowder
Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley)	Cummins
Davidson	Davies
Day	Del Mastro
Devolin	Dewar
Doyle	Dykstra
Emerson	Epp
Fast	Finley
Fitzpatrick	Flaherty
Fletcher	Galipeau
Gallant	Godin
Goldring	Goodyear
Gourde	Grewal
Guergis	Hanger
Harper	Harris
Harvey	Hawn
Hearn	Hiebert
Hill	Hinton
Jaffer	Jean
Julian	Kamp (Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge—Mission)
Keddy (South Shore—St. Margaret's)	Kenney (Calgary Southeast)
Komarnicki	Kramp (Prince Edward—Hastings)
Lake	Lauzon
Layton	Lemieux
Lukiwski	Lunn
Lunney	MacKay (Central Nova)
MacKenzie	Manning
Mark	Marston
Martin (Winnipeg Centre)	Martin (Sault Ste. Marie)
Mathysen	Mayes
McDonough	Menzies
Merrifield	Millis
Moore (Port Moody—Westwood—Port Coquitlam)	
Moore (Fundy Royal)	
Nash	Nicholson
Norlock	O'Connor
Obhrai	Oda
Pallister	Paradis
Petit	Poilievre
Prentice	Preston
Priddy	Reid
Richardson	Ritz
Savoie	Scheer
Schellenberger	Siksay
Skelton	Smith
Solberg	Sorenson
Stanton	Stoffer
Storseth	Strahl
Sweet	Thompson (New Brunswick Southwest)
Thompson (Wild Rose)	Tilson
Toews	Trost
Turner	Tweed
Van Loan	Vellacott
Verner	Wallace
Warawa	Warkentin
Wasylycia-Leis	Watson

Government Orders

Williams Yelich— 146

PAIRED

Members

Bellavance	Bezan
Carrie	Crête
Lalonde	Loubier
Miller	Plamondon
Rajotte	Shipley
Van Kesteren	Vincent— 12

The Speaker: I declare paragraph C of the amendment defeated.

The next question is on paragraph D of the amendment.

The hon. chief government whip on a point of order.

Hon. Jay Hill: Mr. Speaker, once again, I think if you seek it, you will find the unanimous consent of the House to apply the results of the vote just taken to this motion, with Conservative members present voting no.

Hon. Karen Redman: Mr. Speaker, Liberals will be voting in favour of this motion.

[Translation]

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

Mr. Yvon Godin: Mr. Speaker, the members of the NDP will vote in favour of this motion.

[English]

Hon. Garth Turner: Mr. Speaker, my vote is no.

(The House divided on paragraph D of the amendment, which was agreed to on the following division:)

(Division No. 67)

YEAS

Members

Alghabra	André
Angus	Asselin
Atamanenko	Bachand
Bagnell	Bains
Barbot	Barnes
Beaumier	Bélanger
Bell (Vancouver Island North)	Bell (North Vancouver)
Bennett	Bevilacqua
Bigras	Black
Blaikie	Blais
Bonin	Bonsant
Boshcoff	Bouchard
Bourgeois	Brisson
Brown (Oakville)	Brunelle
Byrne	Cardin
Carrier	Chamberlain
Chan	Charlton
Chow	Christopherson
Comartin	Comuzzi
Cotler	Crowder
Cullen (Skeena—Bulkley Valley)	Cullen (Etobicoke North)
Cuzner	D'Amours
Davies	DeBellefeuille
Demers	Deschamps
Dewar	Dhalla
Dosanjh	Duceppe
Easter	Eyking
Faille	Freeman
Fry	Gagnon
Gaudet	Gauthier
Godfrey	Godin
Goodale	Graham
Guay	Guimond
Holland	Hubbard

Jennings	Julian
Kadis	Karetak-Lindell
Karygiannis	Keeper
Khan	Kotto
Laforest	Laframboise
Lavallée	Layton
LeBlanc	Lee
Lemay	Lessard
Lévesque	Lussier
MacAulay	Malhi
Malo	Maloney
Marleau	Marston
Martin (Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca)	Martin (Winnipeg Centre)
Martin (LaSalle—Émard)	Martin (Sault Ste. Marie)
Mathysen	Matthews
McCallum	McDonough
McGuinity	McGuire
McKay (Scarborough—Guildwood)	Ménard (Hochelaga)
Ménard (Marc-Aurèle-Fortin)	Merasty
Minna	Mourani
Murphy (Moncton—Riverview—Dieppe)	Murphy (Charlottetown)
Nadeau	Nash
Neville	Ouellet
Pacetti	Paquette
Patry	Perron
Peterson	Picard
Priddy	Proulx
Ratansi	Redman
Regan	Robillard
Rodriguez	Rota
Roy	Russell
Savage	Savoie
Scarpaleggia	Scott
Sgro	Siksay
Simard	Simms
St-Cyr	St-Hilaire
St. Amand	St. Denis
Stoffer	Szabo
Telegdi	Thibault (Rimouski-Neigette—Témiscouata—Les
Basques)	
Thibault (West Nova)	
Valley	Tonks
Wasylcia-Leis	Wappel
Wilson	Willfert
Zed— 155	Wrzesnewskyj

NAYS

Members

Abblonczy
Allen
Ambrose
Anderson
Batters
Bernier
Blaney
Breitkreuz
Brown (Barrie)
Calkins
Cannon (Pontiac)
Casson
Clement
Davidson
Del Mastro
Doyle
Emerson
Fast
Fitzpatrick
Fletcher
Gallant
Goodyear
Grewal
Hanger
Harris
Hawn
Hiebert
Hinton
Jean
Keddy (South Shore—St. Margaret's)
Komarnicki
Lake
Lemieux
Lunn

Private Members' Business

Lunney	MacKay (Central Nova)
MacKenzie	Manning
Mark	Mayes
Menzies	Merrifield
Mills	Moore (Port Moody—Westwood—Port Coquitlam)
Moore (Fundy Royal)	Nicholson
Norlock	O'Connor
Obhrai	Oda
Pallister	Paradis
Petit	Poilievre
Prentice	Preston
Reid	Richardson
Ritz	Scheer
Schellenberger	Skelton
Smith	Solberg
Sorenson	Stanton
Storseth	Strahl
Sweet	Thompson (New Brunswick Southwest)
Thompson (Wild Rose)	Tilson
Toews	Trost
Turner	Tweed
Van Loan	Vellacott
Verner	Wallace
Warawa	Warkentin
Watson	Williams
Yelich— 119	

PAIRED

Members

Bellavance	Bezan
Carrie	Crête
Lalonde	Loubier
Miller	Plamondon
Rajotte	Shipley
Van Kesteren	Vincent— 12

The Speaker: I declare paragraph D of the amendment carried.

Accordingly, the question is on the main motion, as amended.

Is it the pleasure of the House to adopt the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

An hon. member: On division.

The Speaker: I declare the motion carried.

(Motion agreed to)

The Speaker: It being 6:10 p.m., the House will now proceed to the consideration of private members' business as listed on today's order paper.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

•(1810)

[English]

EARLY LEARNING AND CHILD CARE ACT

The House resumed from September 25 consideration of the motion that Bill C-303, An Act to establish criteria and conditions in respect of funding for early learning and child care programs in order to ensure the quality, accessibility, universality and accountability of those programs, and to appoint a council to advise the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development on matters relating to early learning and child care, be read the second time and referred to a committee.

Mr. Omar Alghabra (Mississauga—Erindale, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to extend my support for Bill C-303, the early learning and child care act.

The bill is based on the Liberal child care plan and the side agreements between the previous Liberal government and 10 provinces. Those agreements were all cancelled by the current minority Conservative government.

Yesterday Canada marked National Child Day. It is an opportunity to assess how we are meeting the needs of this and future generations of young Canadians. Sadly, the Conservative Party is moving backward by cancelling our investment in hundreds of thousands of new child care spaces.

Canadian families have been advocating for more choice in affordable and high quality child care. The minority Conservative government has chosen to ignore their call and has cancelled the agreements that were struck with the provinces. Despite what the government claims, this will take away the choice for most working families. Years of discussion and planning have all been thrown away and our country has been set back more than 30 years when it comes to child care accessibility.

In my riding and all over the country there is a great sense of disappointment that funding for creating new child care spaces has come to an end. Waiting lists for child care spaces continue to grow and costs continue to rise, yet the Conservatives have done nothing to help the situation.

Earlier in the year the Conservatives promised to work with business and organizations around the country to create new child care spaces. What have they done? Whom have they consulted with? How many spaces have they created?

As anyone who has visited the government's universal child care website will know, this website reveals the lack of seriousness the Conservatives are displaying toward the challenge that Canadian families are facing. It has no substance, no clear plan, no direction. It is just a bunch of empty rhetoric that does nothing to ease the concerns of families who are waiting for a day care space for their child or for women who are compelled to put their career or education aspirations on hold because they cannot afford the day care spaces that are available.

The government's poor child care policies have frustrated Canadian working families. Many families were surprised to learn this past summer that they will no longer receive the Canada child tax benefit supplement. More than three-quarters of a million families were disappointed to learn that they will no longer receive those benefits and they had no notice or early warning.

Private Members' Business

One would find it hard to believe that given all these failures, early childhood learning and education was one of the now forgotten five priorities of the Conservatives. If creating child care spaces is a priority for the government, I would hate to see what it would have done if it was a secondary issue. Then again, we have seen what the Conservative government has done to reduce wait times for receiving health care. Nothing. We have seen what it has done to tackle climate change and the environmental challenges we are facing. Nothing. Similarly, we have seen its simplistic approach to preventing and reducing the spread of crime. We have seen how it misled Canadians on the income trust file. We have seen how it is damaging Canada's long-standing foreign policy tradition of diplomacy and promotion of peace that all Canadians are proud of.

It comes as no surprise to many Canadians that the Conservatives never intended to take the issue of child care seriously, but it sure is very disappointing.

While many other countries around the world have realized the importance and urgent need for a systemic approach to child care that provides children equal access to reliable high quality early childhood education and care, the current government has reversed the progress our society has made over the past few years. That is really too bad because studies have shown that early learning positively affects the child's ability to learn later on in life. These studies have also shown that it helps children develop social skills.

All of those outcomes would have a significant positive impact on Canada's economic, social and cultural growth and development, not to mention that the availability of high quality day care would provide parents with real choice if they wanted to stay at home with their children or if they wanted to send them to a trusted and reliable day care centre while they pursued their career or educational aspirations.

• (1815)

Thanks to the Prime Minister and his Conservative government, a national child care strategy has been removed from the national agenda. The Prime Minister has decided to absolve himself from this great responsibility. He has instead downloaded the responsibility to parents. He claims that a taxable \$100 a month allowance is a child care strategy. The truth is that he wants Canadian children and families to fend for themselves.

Parents who cannot afford to stay at home or send their children to an expensive private day care institution will not find the Prime Minister on their side willing to accept the responsibility of the challenges for the collective well-being of our society and our future.

The Conservatives' taxable \$100 a month allowance is a child bonus that would be helpful to any family, but would it actually cover the cost of child care? The average cost of child care in my city of Mississauga is about \$800 to \$900 a month. Similar rates are found around the country. Of course, this is assuming that a parent can find a child care space. How is this taxable child care bonus supposed to help with the creation of affordable and accessible child care spaces?

I have been repeatedly told by many Canadians and child care advocacy groups that their needs are urgent. Why are the Conservatives completely ignoring these needs? Do the Conserva-

tives think if they dismiss these calls and if they pretend that this is not a real issue that it will go away on its own, that somehow, affordable child care spaces would be created out of thin air?

It is high time the government faced reality and accepted its responsibilities. Canadians will no longer tolerate partisan rhetoric or empty promises. Canadians want to see some action. Canadians want to see a real plan for the development of a systemic approach that will establish high quality early childhood education across the board.

I urge the Conservative minority government to step up to this national necessity. We are risking the future of our country if we continue to pretend that these challenges do not exist.

Canadians have told us that this is a priority. The Conservatives cannot hide behind a gimmick and assume that they have addressed these needs. This is beyond political partisanship.

The government must acknowledge its responsibility and act on it now. We need to see real results in the creation of high quality, accessible child care spaces. That is why I am supporting Bill C-303.

• (1820)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Christiane Gagnon (Québec, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to speak to Bill C-303, which was introduced by a colleague from the NDP.

We have some reservations about this bill because child care services are the responsibility of the provincial governments, specifically of Quebec. Hon. members know that Quebec set up a very sophisticated child care service that responds to public pressure expressing a need to help men and women, but mostly women, who have jobs and want their children to have a safe place to be cared for while they are at work. This program is part of an integrated service to help all Quebec families.

We have carefully examined Bill C-303. I would like to read its title.

An Act to establish criteria and conditions in respect of funding for early learning and child care programs in order to ensure the quality, accessibility, universality and accountability of those programs, and to appoint a council to advise the Minister of Human Resources and Skills Development on matters relating to early learning and child care.

Hon. members have to understand how a title worded that way could bother the Bloc Québécois. Nonetheless, we went further and there is indeed an exemption. I will read clauses 3 and 4 to explain how the Bloc Québécois came to accept this bill.

3. The purpose of this Act is to establish criteria and conditions that must be met before a child care transfer payment may be made in support of the early learning and child care program of a province or territory.

Nonetheless, there is an exemption.

4. Recognizing the unique nature of the jurisdiction of the Government of Quebec with regard to the education and development of children in Quebec society, and notwithstanding any other provision of this Act, the Government of Quebec may choose to be exempted from the application of this Act and, notwithstanding any such decision, shall receive the full transfer payment that would otherwise be paid under section 5.

Private Members' Business

It is no surprise that, thanks to this exemption, the Bloc Québécois supports this bill, because we understand that all Canadians would very much like to have access to quality, safe day care services where children can not only have access to such services, but also be socialized with other children at various levels and from different cultures.

As we all know, Quebec created its own child care program. Furthermore, the previous Liberal government wanted to create a national child care program.

I remember that when I sat on the Standing Committee on Human Resources, I expressed my position at the time to the NDP and the hon. member for Sault Ste. Marie, who was involved in the project. I explained to him why Quebec deserved to be treated with sensitivity. I think I got my message across. We worked on it and I tried to explain to them how Quebec could not be dependent on the federal government and subject to federal standards and criteria, while Quebec was in fact the leader in child care services for all Quebecers, and even a leader beyond Quebec.

We are very pleased to see that we were successful and able to convey the sensitivity that was required in introducing such a child care program.

We are very disappointed that the Conservative Party, which is now in power, completely scrapped the project. Thus, we will not see the creation of such a child care program for all Canadians. Furthermore, this has a financial impact on Quebec, which should have been paid \$800 million, because Quebec was entitled to opt out with full compensation. The Quebec government invests some \$2 billion a year in child care services. Under this bill, it could proceed in its own way.

•(1825)

For example, Quebec could use that money to fund all of its programs for families. Quebec is helping its families in a number of other sectors by spending more than \$4.493 billion on child assistance, the work premium, the Quebec sales tax credit, the childcare tax credit and parental leave.

This shows that Quebec is proactive overall and should perhaps be even more so. This bill could enable the province to invest even more funds. The NDP's Bill C-303 satisfies us in part because it has the kind of flexibility we want.

We know that the Conservative Party decided to offer families dubious assistance by giving them a \$1,200 allowance. As we all know, this allowance is considered taxable income, which means that most families will not really get \$1,200. Depending on a family's income, it might get only \$700. We know that childcare services cost a lot more than that and that those costs are incurred by the population as a whole. We want to give people a choice.

What choice did the Conservative Party give families and everyone else in Canada and Quebec? That being said, I would add that Quebec now has its own childcare services, so this issue does not matter as much to us.

The only choice is to accept the \$1,200 allowance. There is virtually no child care available for \$7 a day, a price the public can afford. We know that low-income and single-parent families cannot

afford \$25 to \$30 a day for child care, because they earn minimum wage in some cases. Clearly, the Conservative government did not think about all Canadian families when it offered the \$1,200 allowance, and it would be easy to challenge the policy's fairness. The government did not come up with a better offer than \$1,200, paid for by Canadian taxpayers.

I would also like to raise another sore point regarding this practice. Some child care costs \$7 a day, while full service costs \$25 to \$30 a day on average. Families paying that amount can deduct their child care expenses from their taxes. Out of 435,000 children, 200,000 receive child care services in Quebec. That means that the families of 200,000 children are not claiming their tax credit. This service therefore costs the government nothing, because these 200,000 families are not claiming a federal tax credit. The government is therefore saving money.

This is creating a shortfall in Quebec that is equivalent to the investment in child care. The Conservatives lack sensitivity and do not understand this. Because of child care in Quebec, Quebec families are claiming fewer tax credits, and the unclaimed amounts are remaining in the Conservative government's pockets and coffers.

The Conservatives say they want to help Canadians. That would have been a good way to help them, because the \$1,200 is a direct subsidy for families. Instead of using tax measures and a non-refundable tax credit, the government wanted to take a different approach. We criticized this during the election campaign. Nothing more can be done for Canadians.

I am glad to have taken part in this debate, and I would like to commend the work that my colleague from Trois-Rivières has done on this issue. She has taken over the child care issue, and I am pleased that she has conveyed the Bloc Québécois message very proactively.

•(1830)

[English]

Ms. Peggy Nash (Parkdale—High Park, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am proud to stand in support of Bill C-303, the early learning and child care act. I commend my NDP colleagues from Victoria and Trinity—Spadina for their efforts to bring the bill to the House.

This is an important evening for Canada because the bill is about the future of Canada. Nothing is more precious to us than our children and nothing is more important than investing in our children.

I will begin by quoting someone I admire greatly, Stephen Lewis, the former UN envoy for HIV-AIDS. He said:

Everybody now understands, I think...that early learning and child care fused together is the kind of objective which any civilized society strives for, and that it becomes an indispensable and vital dimension of a child's life, enhancing all of the family characteristics which shore up the child, but profoundly influencing in the most positive imaginable way the opportunities for the child.

The science on this is also very clear. In the landmark study, *Reversing the Real Brain Drain: Early Years*, the hon. Margaret Norrie McCain and J. Fraser Mustard found that the evidence from the neurosciences was clear that the early years of development, from conception to age six, particularly for the first three years, set the foundations for competence and coping skills that affected learning, behaviour and health throughout a person's life, and that, in view of that evidence, the period of early childhood development was equal to or of greater importance for the next generation than the periods spent in education or post-secondary education. Their findings led them to recommend that early childhood development should have high priority for policy makers.

However, we saw with previous Liberal governments, year after year, majority government after majority government, surplus budget after surplus budget, that they failed the children of Canada. They failed to bring in a national child care program. It was only until, tainted with scandal, at the very last minute they finally tried to introduce some funding for child care. However, they failed to bring in what this bill would bring in, which is a national early learning and child care act.

It is not surprising that the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development noted that Canada was and is in a free fall behind other industrialized nations when it comes to early learning and child care services. In fact, it found that out of the 20 OECD member states, Canada was at the bottom of public spending on child care. Canada spends a mere 0.3% of GDP on early childhood services and we failed to make progress on other OECD recommended standards, such as the fact that child care services outside of Quebec remain fragmented, relying on underpaid child care workers and a combination of high parent fees and small subsidies for low income families.

What does this mean for Canadians? In Toronto, 70% of mothers are working and one-third of our children are living below the poverty level. Forty per cent of low income children live in single female parent families. We know that high quality care benefits all children but it benefits children in poverty most. In fact, good quality care is one of the essential pathways out of poverty for families. However, almost 10,000 children in Toronto are on the waiting list for subsidized care.

I just want to give a couple of examples in my own community. The Early Enrichment Day Care Centre in my community has the names of 160 infants on the waiting list and once a child's name is on the list it can take up to two years before the child is actually accepted at the centre. After a child turns two, the parents can no longer put their child in infant care. They must then try to put the child into toddler care. However, if the child has not been in the infant care, the infants who were in infant care get first choice. When these children lose out on toddler care they then lose out on the preschool care. If a parent does not have their child in the infant program, the child may not receive child care at all.

●(1835)

Let us look at the Macaulay Child Development Centre. Unlike Quebec, where child care costs parents \$7 a day per child, infant care at the Macaulay Child Development Centre costs \$65.18 a day or \$1,400 a month. What family can afford \$1,400 for one child, let

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alone two or three? Yet at the Macaulay Child Development Centre, the waiting list has close to 500 children. Not all of them are infants, but a number of them are.

I also want to read for members a plea I had from a supervisor at a local child care centre in my riding: She wrote:

As the supervisor of a local childcare with a wait list of 72 preschoolers (minimum 10-12 month wait list), the time has come for a National Child Care Strategy.

Many of our parents do not qualify for subsidy under the current rules but struggle to pay the high cost of full fee care. Many have had to make alternative arrangements using unlicensed care because of not being able to afford care or have access because the wait list is so long.

We are located in a Public School that is quickly running out of free space to use as well and without the promised Child care dollars (that included monies to create and build spaces), we have no choice but to keep telling parents, I'm sorry, we are full. You may be lucky to get a space next year.

This is a tragedy for young people in our country. It is simply not acceptable. The Conservative alternative to this of offering an allowance to parents does not improve the choice of parents seeking child care. It does not help the parents who are on that 500-child waiting list. It does not create one new space for children.

It is time that we addressed the failure of both the Liberal and the Conservative governments in Canada. That is why this bill is so critical.

I have not often taken to quoting the head of the Bank of Canada, David Dodge, but I will also quote him this evening. Mr. Dodge said recently:

In an increasingly complex and competitive world, furthering our national economic welfare will depend importantly on the quality of our labour force...the first step to improving skills is to build an excellent infrastructure for early childhood development, feeding into a school system that effectively teaches basic skills.

It is clear that early learning and child care programs promote children's well-being and strengthen the foundation for lifelong learning. David Dodge gets it. Stephen Lewis gets it. Quebec gets it. The OECD countries, besides Canada, get it. And now, thanks to the NDP, we hope that after this bill passes the children of Canada will also get it and will get the child care that they need and deserve.

Mr. James Lunney (Nanaimo—Alberni, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to have this opportunity to join the debate on Bill C-303, introduced by the member for Victoria.

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Before I begin, I would like to remind the House that Canada's new government understands the importance of supporting families to ensure Canada's bright future. Our support for Canadian families is so determined that upon taking office we made child care one of our government's top five priorities.

In just a few months since taking office, our government has introduced and, more importantly, acted on a universal child care plan, a truly remarkable feat when one considers that the previous Liberal government entertained promises on child care without delivering a single space or benefit in 13 long years. Illusions ultimately lead to disappointment. This government has provided real support directly to all families with preschool age children and, second, Canada's new government is supporting the creation of new child care spaces.

Our universal child care plan represents a flexible approach. Its components benefit the family, and new child care spaces do not demand an either/or decision. Rather, this plan offers flexibility so that parents and communities can find solutions that work best for them.

Our plan does not impose on other jurisdictions, as do the conditions and criteria laid out in Bill C-303. Our plan is one where one component complements the other.

Our new government's approach to child care is a balanced approach which recognizes that parents are the ones best placed to choose the type of child care that best suits their specific needs. Central to our program is the universal child care benefit that places money directly in the hands of parents, \$100 per month for each child under age six. This benefit gives parents the freedom and the flexibility to make decisions that address the unique needs of their families.

Our government's response to child care has sparked positive commentary from coast to coast. For example, an op-ed piece in the New Brunswick *Telegraph-Journal* called it a "profound statement" that this government values the efforts of Canadian parents, including stay at home parents. A *Vancouver Sun* opinion column praised our plan's flexibility for parents, noting that the extra \$1,200 "may make the difference between working full- or part-time while the kids are small". The paper also stated, "It also helps parents who work shifts—something 'day care', by definition—can't handle".

Shockingly, the meanspirited NDP, which claims to be in favour of supporting the child care needs of Canadians, is actively trying to gut this important social program. Just recently at the human resources committee, the NDP social policy critic, the member for Sault Ste. Marie, introduced a motion that would in effect take away the universal child care benefit from Canadian children and families just in time for the holiday season.

Nevertheless, Bill C-303 is an inadequate and inappropriate attempt to address the child care needs of Canadian parents and represents a significant intrusion into provincial and territorial jurisdiction. The one size fits all approach it endorses, much like the agreement signed by the former government, does not work for the diverse child care needs facing Canadian families.

As the findings of the April 2006 Statistics Canada report "Child Care in Canada" showed, the factors that contribute to a decision

regarding a family's caring arrangements are multiple and diverse. The report stated, "The use of certain types of care differed with respect to a number of characteristics, including the community in which the child lived, the income level of the child's family and the parental place of birth".

Another notable finding of the report was that despite the increase in the number of families with both parents working outside the home, almost half of children under the age of six are primarily cared for by a parent at home. The report concluded that no one form of child care stands out across the country. In fact, child care patterns vary by region, by the child's background and by some family characteristics.

Consequently, if we are going to have a truly objective debate on child care in Canada, we must recognize that no one size fits all approach, such as the one proposed in Bill C-303, will adequately address the needs of Canadian parents.

We recognize that there are many parents who need child care outside the home, be it provided by a day care centre or by another means. That is why, as part of Canada's universal child care plan, Canada's new government is committed to introducing new measures to help employers and communities create new spaces where they are needed.

Budget 2006 backed up this commitment by designating \$250 million per year to our child care spaces initiative to support the creation of new spaces. These spaces will be designed, created and delivered in the communities where parents live and work and raise their children.

• (1840)

Our approach will seek to make certain that these new measures work for all businesses and non-profit and community organizations. Moreover, we will provide incentives that will seek to create child care spaces for large urban centres, for smaller rural centres and for parents working a standard nine to five work day and those who are not, while remaining respectful of existing provincial and territorial systems and jurisdictions.

However, as we go about creating these spaces, we are steadfast in our determination not to rush into a poorly designed, top-down, government imposed approach to creating child care spaces. Instead, we will work in conjunction with businesses, non-profit employers and community organizations, as well as the provinces and territories, to draw on their experience and create new child care spaces.

To advance this initiative, the Minister of Human Resources and Social Development recently named a nine member advisory committee to advise her on the design of the child care spaces initiative. This committee, made up of experts in the fields of child care, work-family issues, community organizations and employers, is scheduled to present the minister with its recommendations in the coming months.

In summary, through Canada's universal child care plan, Canadians will find new avenues for innovative and quality child care that will help address their individual needs. Essential to this plan, and what so clearly differentiates it from the approach outlined in Bill C-303, is its acknowledgment of the unique needs of Canadian families and the provision of flexibility to address these needs. This principle serves as a central tenet of our universal child care plan.

To sum up, the former Liberal government's one size fits all approach to child care did not address the diverse needs of Canadian families. Now the NDP is proposing one size fits all child care legislation. On that note, I wonder if the NDP members would explain why, even though they have been vocal—when reporters are near—about a child care crisis for the past decade, they have not once, before 2006, brought forward a private member's bill or a motion on child care for debate in the House during that time.

The fact is that while the NDP pays lip service to child care at election time and when the TV lights are on, Canada's new government is taking real action on our commitment to child care. We are providing parents and the provinces the flexibility and the freedom they need to choose the type of child care that works best for them.

For all of these reasons, I will be voting against Bill C-303. I urge all hon. colleagues to do the same.

• (1845)

Mr. Gary Merasty (Desnethé—Missinipi—Churchill River, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to speak to Bill C-303, the early learning and child care act. Early learning and child care spaces are a necessity for Saskatchewan. Creating spaces are incredibly important for addressing the growing labour gap in Saskatchewan and providing parents the option of affordable and accessible child care spaces as they take on employment, learning or training opportunities, or simply desire a child care choice.

Although I am supportive of the intent of this bill, it calls attention to the loss of the early learning and child care agreements that the previous Liberal government reached with the provinces, as well as the Kelowna accord. Child care agreements were created in consultation with each of the provinces, and met unique challenges and opportunities for each province.

The Kelowna accord met concerns of aboriginal leaders and encouraged the first nations, Métis and Inuit communities to proceed with their own plan that responded to the challenges of their own communities and opportunities as well. As a result, communities and provinces were able to take the lead and ownership of their own child care programs.

The NDP has reasons for attempting to claim to be child care champions. To openly admit the truth that it played a major role in scrapping the Liberal child care agreements causes it the same unease and discomfort it has had to confront about assisting the Conservatives in scrapping the Kelowna accord. Perhaps this resulted in short term political gain, but it represents terrible progressive policy.

What is most disappointing to me about the NDP's and the Conservative Party's betrayal of the child care agreements is that

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they strike a blow against Saskatchewan. Both the Saskatchewan NDP government and the conservative official opposition Saskatchewan Party recognized this and have advocated for the agreements to be honoured.

This March both parties joined together in the Saskatchewan legislature to unanimously pass a motion introduced by the Saskatchewan learning minister. The motion expressed Saskatchewan's dissatisfaction with the federal government for cancelling early learning and child care agreements with the provinces, and not fulfilling the previous Liberal government's commitments.

The reason for this show of unity is clear. The situation in Saskatchewan is dire. A recent University of Toronto study revealed that only 4.9% of children under 12 years of age had access to regulated child care spaces in Saskatchewan.

The Liberals responded to this alarming situation. The Saskatchewan NDP government and the previous Liberal federal government signed a five year \$146 million agreement in principle last year, with Saskatchewan receiving about \$22.6 million in the first year and \$20 million for the next year.

The province's child care plan would extend pre-kindergarten services to all four-year-olds in the province, add 7,200 new child care spaces and increase training for early childhood educators. Moreover, with the Kelowna accord \$100 million was dedicated to early learning and child care spaces on reserves. In Saskatchewan on reserve populations are increasing at an incredible rate and early learning and child care opportunities are very limited.

The Saskatchewan legislature is also united in its support of the Kelowna accord as well. In March the provincial NDP government and the Saskatchewan Party joined yet again to pass a unanimous motion calling on the federal Conservative government to implement that accord, but the Conservatives have not listened to this show of unity. Instead, they have decided to cover up the truth.

One of the most often repeated lines by many Conservative MPs is that the previous Liberal government did not create any child care spaces. On April 11 the Prime Minister stated in question period that "the Liberals did not create any child care spaces". On April 25 the Minister of Human Resources and Social Development went further stating in question period that "spaces were never created by the previous government". This would be a fantastic argument if it were true. However, it is false.

Spaces were created and the Conservatives are taking those spaces away. For example, in Ontario where the federal-provincial child care agreement had time to be implemented, 8,000 spaces were created. These spaces benefited all regions, rural and urban as well.

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The Regina *Leader-Post* in fact revealed on May 29 that child care spaces were created in the social development minister's own riding of Haldimand—Norfolk, with more on the way. Badly needed spaces were created in the minister's own rural riding.

Here is what her constituents are saying, which she would hear if she were not so busy avoiding Caledonia. Norfolk County Mayor Rita Kalmbach stated, "I do know we are in need of spaces, no doubt about it. We the country, the municipality couldn't kick in its own money to establish these spots that we've lost, nor could the school board".

Jodi Guilmette, who oversees child care programs in Norfolk County, said that the Conservative plan "limits the flexibility we have in terms of offering services to families in our community. We don't have any capital funds to create the structures to house the programs families need and that's our biggest challenge".

• (1850)

Many other rural voices added their support to the Liberal plan as well. In the August 10, 2006 issue of the *Western Producer* the Canadian Federation of Agriculture, the largest agricultural organization in Canada, voiced its support for the Liberal plan saying that without direct investment spaces in rural areas will not be created.

The Conservatives are using a plan of deliberate deception saying that no spaces were created because they have no plan of their own to create any child care spaces. They have simply tried to ignore the problem and fake up a plan while abandoning the child care agreements and the Kelowna accord.

Their fake plan is a tax credit plan which has a proven history of failure in Canada. In Saskatchewan the exact same plan was tried, did not have any take up, and simply withered away.

No spaces in rural or economically disadvantaged areas of cities will be created since there are few large organizations that operate in those areas and they are the only ones who can afford to set up the spaces. Moreover, the plan completely ignores large youth populations on reserve because of the different tax environment.

Finally, there is literally no plan of maintaining any spaces even if they could be created. There is only a one time credit or grant. This is a hollow, fake plan. There is not much hope that the Conservatives will learn from any of these mistakes since key players in child care are not involved in the advisory committee, notably no aboriginal organizations.

In fact, when the social development minister was questioned on November 1 by the member for Churchill on the involvement of aboriginal people in making the child care spaces initiative, the minister's reply was: "We do not do racial profiling". What kind of garbage answer is that? Nobody asked a question about race. It was a question about how to ensure that the fastest growing population of Canada was fairly represented in this initiative.

No doubt, sooner or later the Conservatives will realize that the only plan that can reliably open up spaces is the Liberal plan. The Liberal plan provided the predictable reliable investment that rural and remote communities need to set up these spaces.

As for the Conservative family allowance, misleadingly referred to as the universal child care benefit, I am fully in support of giving parents assistance to help with raising their children, but there are inherent flaws in the family allowance and tax changes that have been made that hurt families and need to be changed.

The family allowance is taxable with new Conservative tax grabs introduced in the 2006 budget. Families stand to lose a lot of the payment. First, the Conservatives threw a lot more parents on to the tax rolls, 200,000 in total, by cutting the amount that people can earn tax free by \$400.

Second, they hiked up the lowest income tax rate from 15% to 15.5%. This hike affects people making up to \$36,000 which is slightly above the average income in Saskatchewan.

Third, they did a double whammy on all families and married taxpayers. They slashed the amount people could claim for each eligible dependant and also their spouse or common law partner, both by \$340.

These outright tax grabs claw back not only what families can get from the Conservative family allowance, but also leech family income far before and far beyond the time families can receive the benefit. This is shameful.

As a final insult, the low and middle income monthly young child supplement has also been clawed back, pretty much drying up any new support that the family allowance would give to low and middle income families.

The Conservatives could have honoured all of these child care agreements this year and fully funded the Kelowna accord, and could have still dedicated over \$11 billion to paying down the debt. But the Conservatives chose not to support the early learning and child care spaces. They chose not to support first nations, Métis and Inuit children and young families, and then they went after adult literacy, health programs and funding to museums.

If the Conservatives really wanted to cut wasteful spending, they would do well to look no further than their useless tax credits for spaces. Freeing up that money would go a long way to adopt the Liberal plan of direct investment.

• (1855)

Mr. Russ Hiebert (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of National Defence, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am grateful for the opportunity to contribute to the debate on Bill C-303, the proposed early learning and child care act, introduced by the member for Victoria.

Canada's new government recognizes that one of the most important investments we can make as a country is to give parents choices when it comes to caring for their children. We take our commitment to support parents' choice of child care very seriously. There are strong reasons why we are pursuing choice in child care.

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First, it is one of the key priorities we promised to pursue during the recent election. We work to keep our promises.

Canadians voted for a platform that put choice in child care as a top five priority. We reaffirmed our promise of choice in child care in the Speech from the Throne. We committed the funds in budget 2006. We have delivered on that commitment to Canadian families through our universal child care plan. A promise made, a promise kept.

The second reason we believe in choice in child care is because of the benefits it delivers to every Canadian family.

Unlike the inadequate and ineffective approach envisioned in Bill C-303, our new universal child care plan recognizes that no two Canadian families are alike. We understand that parents with young children balance their work and family lives in different ways and for different reasons.

We are very aware, for example, that the services provided by day care facilities open 9 to 5 are simply not an option for the many Canadian parents whose schedules require that they work evenings, weekends, split shifts or 12 hour shifts. Neither is standard day care the answer for parents taking evening courses to enhance their skills. Standard day care is an equally unrealistic option for farming families, for families working in the fisheries, and for the many Canadians with young children who live in rural or remote communities.

Moreover, as a recent Statistics Canada study confirmed, almost half of Canadian parents continue to find ways to stay at home to care for their preschool children themselves.

Unfortunately, Bill C-303 lacks the flexibility that would enable parents to make the choices they want. While this bill fails to properly respect the expertise of parents, it also fails to respect the established roles and responsibilities of the provinces in the realm of child care service delivery. On the contrary, what Bill C-303 proposes is tantamount to an intrusion into provincial jurisdiction.

This act would impose singular, one size fits all criteria and conditions on provincial governments in order for them to qualify for federal early learning and child care funding.

I want this House to take note of the irony in this bill. The previous Liberal-NDP coalition in this House had the opportunity to implement this one size fits all day care program this bill reflects, but it did not. In fact, the Liberals were promising one size fits all day care for 13 years and for four elections, and never delivered a single additional care space directly from the federal government.

While I have no doubt the member for Victoria is sincere in her desire to help families, I believe she should look at the reasons why this proposal has consistently failed.

The reasons are that most families cannot, or do not, fit into a one size fits all program, and no government can afford the incredible cost of formal day care for every Canadian child.

Given the wide range of parental situations and needs, and the diverse needs of our provinces and territories, we have developed and, more importantly, acted on a child care plan that responds to the diverse circumstances and real needs of Canadian families. Our plan

represents a flexible, balanced approach that would enable parents and communities to develop the child care solutions that work best for them.

This is a plan founded on respect for parental expertise in deciding what is best for their children, and for the roles and responsibilities of the provinces in delivering child care services.

However, it is important to mention that there is another long term benefit to Canadian society of providing greater choice to parents. That benefit is that many more Canadians may decide to become parents or, if they already are parents, they may choose to have an additional child.

Offering Canadian parents greater freedom to decide such important questions for themselves has tremendous importance for the future of our home and native land. That is because our national birthrate has now fallen well below replacement levels. Canadian women are now having 1.5 children, on average. The replacement rate is 2.1. Anything less means a nation begins shrinking rather than growing. This could lead to serious problems.

As the baby boom generation begins to retire, our shrinking birthrate will start to have its impact. Fewer children now means fewer people entering the workforce in the coming years. Fewer workers means fewer taxpayers able to contribute to valued social programs. Our pay as we go public pension plan was predicated on the idea that a certain ratio of workers to retirees was necessary to be self-sustaining.

● (1900)

It is in the interests of Canadian society and our various governments to do what we can to encourage and support family formation and child rearing. Providing families with as much freedom as possible to make the child care choices that are right for them can further this goal.

As the House is aware, our universal child care plan has two parts: a universal child care benefit and a child care spaces initiative. Together these two components represent an investment of close to \$12 billion over five years to improve the lives of Canadian families, an investment that is more than twice that proposed by the former Liberal government.

Allow me to elaborate for a moment on the first component of the plan, the universal child care benefit. This direct benefit to Canadian families helps them to choose the type of child care that works best for them.

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This past July, parents across Canada began receiving the benefit of \$100 a month for each child under the age of six, a benefit they are free to use for the best interests of their own children. For example, they can apply the \$1,200 a year toward the cost of formal day care, or they can use the benefit to pay for occasional babysitting, or for child care help from a grandparent or a neighbour. If parents so choose, they can purchase educational resources like books and supplies for their preschoolers, or they can use the benefit to pay for special outings to a museum, a zoo or a gallery. As I noted earlier, we respect parents' choices and this is what the benefit delivers.

I should mention that the day our universal child care benefit came into effect, my daughter Kate was born. I can well relate to the many families who are not able to access or utilize nine to five day care. Like many other Canadian families with the employment or geographical circumstances I just mentioned, my wife and I live with circumstances that make nine to five day care at the same formal day care facility impractical. However, for us, that benefit will come in handy for babysitting and educational supplies for our Canada Day baby.

I have heard from many parents who appreciate the difference those monthly cheques make in their lives. In fact across Canada 1.6 million families with 2.1 million children now receive the benefit. Families who are already registered for the Canada child tax benefit, which account for 90% of those 1.6 million families, receive the universal child care benefit automatically.

However, we want to ensure that all parents with preschoolers receive the benefit. To this end, the government has been very active in reaching out to the families not currently registered for the Canada child tax benefit to encourage them to apply. Our outreach efforts include a special website, radio ads, and print ads in national and local daily papers.

The government is proud to support the choices of all Canadian parents in trying to give their preschoolers a strong start in life.

Canada's new government is equally committed to the second component of our universal child care plan that will provide a flexible approach to child care spaces that meets Canadian parents' diverse needs. The new child care spaces initiative will provide incentives that can be translated into more child care options in large urban centres and rural areas, or for the many parents whose work hours do not fit the standard nine to five model.

In designing this initiative, we have been consulting with the provinces and territories, as well as businesses, communities and non-profit organizations to tap into their expertise. Furthermore, a ministerial advisory committee was named by the Minister of Human Resources and Social Development to advise her on the design of the child care spaces initiative. The committee, chosen for expertise in child care, work family issues, community organizations and the needs of employers, will present the minister with a report outlining its advice and recommendations later this year.

This responsive, flexible approach which respects parents' choices and expertise and the roles and responsibilities of the provinces is in keeping with our promise to Canadians. For these reasons, we are

unable to support the narrow solutions to child care and early learning proposed by the member for Victoria in Bill C-303.

●(1905)

Ms. Denise Savoie (Victoria, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I would like to start by acknowledging the particular efforts of my colleague from Trinity—Spadina on this bill.

I will conclude the debate by saying that the early learning and child care act can be the cornerstone of social policy for Canadian families for generations.

In this debate we have established the value of quality early learning opportunities to give our children the best possible start. We have established the link between child care early learning and the welfare of Canada's social fabric and economy.

The debate then comes down to the question of how to create a truly universal, quality child care system that respects parents, the provinces and territories.

Everyone but the Conservatives knows that their claims of providing universal choice in child care are bogus. A single mom from Victoria wrote to me because she cannot afford to stay at home with her two little girls, nor can she afford both rent and child care on her salary. What choice does \$100 give her?

The Conservatives, on the other hand, have spent \$2 million to advertise this \$100. They have spent \$27 million delivering the cheques. Now they talk about \$250 million for private child care spaces and they do not know how to spend that yet. Their proposal will leave many families behind.

In contrast, the early learning and child care act would ensure adequate, stable federal funding to guarantee truly universal access to public child care that would give every Canadian family the choice between quality child care or staying at home.

The Conservatives argue that Bill C-303 imposes one size fits all child care on the provinces. This is patently absurd. The bill actually expands the capacity of the provinces and territories to provide flexible child care options at the hours and locations parents need.

For those parents who choose to not participate in a public system, Bill C-303 does not remove the \$100 baby bonus boost of the Conservatives. It would do what that money will not do. It would create child care spaces that every Canadian family could afford.

[*Translation*]

I am disappointed because the Conservative government has not yet agreed to make this bill subject to a royal recommendation. Tomorrow's vote will finally require it, I hope, to recognize that two thirds of Canadians rejected its child care plan in the last election.

We are open, of course, to proposals for changes that could be presented in committee. In fact, our objective at this stage is to draw attention to the need for Canada to have a public child care network and to have a practical discussion on how the federal government can best contribute to it.

Quebec's child care network is a model in Canada's otherwise bleak picture in this area, according to the OECD.

We are thrilled to see that the Bloc is able to help the rest of Canada get inspired.

[English]

I would like to close with a story. When I was in Halifax a couple of weeks ago for a committee study on the employability of Canadians, the Conservative member on the committee that day spoke of Alberta's negative unemployment, otherwise known as a skills shortage. The response from one of the witnesses struck me as appropriate to our debate today. This was not a child care advocate, but a senior policy analyst with the Canadian Federation of Independent Business no less. She said:

It's true that in Alberta there's a lot of negative unemployment...Recently, I was looking over Statistics Canada numbers, and surprisingly, Alberta has the lowest participation of women in the workforce...Quebec has the highest....The reason is very easy...the day care system. There are factors in the market that work differently than just a job offer. The day care system in Quebec...encourages women to go back to work much sooner after they have children. Alberta doesn't have that—

No wonder the province that has all those well-paying jobs is having trouble motivating women to enter into the labour market.

The bill before us is crucially important. It confronts the cynicism of an individualistic world of everyone for herself or himself. Bill C-303 represents Canadians working together to create a better life for Canadian families, to give the best possible life to our children. Let us make it a reality.

• (1910)

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

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

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

Some hon. members: Yea.

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

Some hon. members: Nay.

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

And five or more members having risen:

The Deputy Speaker: Pursuant to Standing Order 93, the division stands deferred until Wednesday, November 22, 2006, immediately before the time provided for private members' business.

Adjournment Proceedings

ADJOURNMENT PROCEEDINGS

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

[English]

INCOME TRUSTS

Ms. Yasmin Ratansi (Don Valley East, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, on October 31 the Conservative government dropped a bombshell on Canadians by imposing a new tax regime on publicly traded income trusts. The effect on Canadian markets was devastating, resulting in the permanent loss of well over \$20 billion in wealth, most of it at the expense of Canadian seniors who were relying on income trusts for day to day living expenses.

Worst of all, Canadian investors were lured into this massive fraud by a Conservative election promise made by the current Prime Minister. In the middle of the last election, the Prime Minister said on December 9, 2005, "A Conservative government will never raid seniors' nest eggs by taxing income trusts".

Canadian investors took the Conservatives at their word and put more and more of their life savings into income trusts, making this the fastest growing sector on the market, all until the Prime Minister broke his word to Canadians.

Sadly, Canadians are learning the hard way that Conservatives are more than willing to betray election promises without any regard for the damage done to thousands of seniors who worked hard for their life savings, only to have them wiped out with the stroke of a pen.

I have a sample of one of the many letters and emails I received from my constituents in Don Valley East:

The damage done to the value of my investments in income trusts is devastating. I have incurred a 20% decline in value. It is my sincerest wish that an election will be held in the very near future and that the majority of Canadians will not re-elect your party. This is a very sad commentary and one I wish was not necessary to write. However, I have definitely lost my confidence in your party's approach to fair treatment of its citizens, particularly seniors of which I am one.

The current Prime Minister knew how much seniors were depending on income trusts and he still was determined to break his word. I know that the hon. Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance has a speech prepared and she will completely wash over the entire income trust issue and wax on about a minuscule increase in the age credit account and an announcement of income splitting for pensioners. That is an insult. Half of nothing still amounts to nothing.

I suppose seniors are supposed to be grateful to the Conservatives for what they have done, misled them. With one hand the government has swiped billions from seniors through their income trust savings and with the other has offered very little in the form of pension splitting.

In fact, some have construed this pension splitting to be income splitting. It is not. Pension splitting will do very little to curb poverty among seniors and even less to alleviate the huge losses they have suffered as a result of the Conservative income trust fraud.

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Hundreds of thousands of single seniors, the majority of them women, will not see a penny from this policy.

The Liberal Party will have no part in this fraud perpetrated on Canadian taxpayers by the Conservative government.

• (1915)

Ms. Diane Ablonczy (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Finance, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the member has brought to the attention of the House a concern regarding income trusts.

As the member said, on October 31, Canada's new government announced a tax fairness plan for Canadians. The plan will restore balance and fairness to the federal tax system by creating a level playing field between income trusts and corporations and will deliver over \$1 billion of new tax relief each and every year for Canadians, particularly retired Canadians.

This government's commitment during the election was not intended to provide tax holidays for major Canadian corporations in Canada. It was a commitment made to protect the income of seniors over the long haul and to protect the programs that seniors rely on, such as OAS, GIS, CPP, health care and other major programs of the federal government.

This government, therefore, does not and cannot support tax holidays for major corporations. The tax fairness plan was introduced and it includes a distribution tax on distributions from publicly traded income trusts and limited partnerships. However, the distribution of existing income trusts will not be affected by this tax for four years.

It also includes a reduction in the general corporate income tax rate of an additional one-half percentage point as of January 1, 2011, the same time as the taxation of trusts will come into effect. As of 2011, the federal general corporate income tax rate will then be 18.5%.

Also included is an increase in the age credit amount by \$1,000. This will raise the age credit amount from \$4,066 to \$5,066, retroactively effective January 1, 2006.

A major positive change in tax policy for many pensioners is also included: permitting pension income splitting beginning in 2007.

As the House well knows, we were seeing a very troubling trend in acceleration of conversions to income trusts just in the last few months, both those that were announced and those that were about to be announced. In many of these cases, the move was purely to avoid paying corporate income tax. Also, if it had been left unchecked, this new trend would have resulted down the road in literally billions of dollars in foregone revenue for the federal government to invest in the priorities of Canadians, including broad based personal tax relief and important social programs.

Provincial governments were also seeing their revenues seriously eroded by this trend.

The government had a choice: to preserve its own political capital by doing nothing and letting this trend continue and letting corporations in this country, effectively and increasingly, pay no tax at all to support the social programs available to seniors and all Canadians, or to do what had to be done for the country in spite of the fact that it would be politically harmful. We put the country first. It was not an easy decision.

The proposed new distribution tax will not tax—

• (1920)

The Deputy Speaker: Order, please. I am sorry to interrupt the hon. member but the four minutes has expired. The hon. member for Don Valley East.

Ms. Yasmin Ratansi: Mr. Speaker, as expected, the parliamentary secretary to the minister has regurgitated the untruth and reinforced the fact that the government misled the taxpayers, and seniors in particular. It purposely misled people into believing that income trusts were safe. What Canadians really wanted to hear was an apology on behalf of the Conservative Party for ruining the life savings of thousands of Canadian investors and seniors.

The Minister of Finance went on record that he deeply regretted the loss of over \$220 billion of Canadian wealth but he did not see fit to offer an apology for the Conservatives' income trust fraud.

Now that Canadians know that the Conservative election promises are not even worth the paper they are written on, will the parliamentary secretary to the minister do the honourable thing and simply apologize to the Canadian people?

Ms. Diane Ablonczy: Mr. Speaker, the House will know that the situation has changed dramatically over the last few months. In fact, we have done a great deal to mitigate the effect of this very necessary change in policy.

I can also point out to the member and to the House that the government has worked very hard to keep its promises. In fact, in case after case, right down the line, our election promises and priorities have been carried through by the government. In this case, sadly, we were unable to do that, but we have offered to those affected over \$1 billion a year in additional tax breaks to offset some of the effects from this announcement.

Down the road, Canadians will be better off because we were able to preserve the important social programs that support all of us in our lives. Whether it is health care, education or seniors benefits, down the road I know many in the House will understand why this move had to be made.

The Deputy Speaker: The motion to adjourn the House is now deemed to have been adopted. Accordingly, the House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 2 p.m. pursuant to Standing Order 24 (1).

(The House adjourned at 7:23 p.m.)

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