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OFFICIAL REPORT
(HANSARD)

Wednesday, May 16, 2007

Speaker: The Honourable Peter Milliken

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HOUSE OF COMMONS

Wednesday, May 16, 2007

The House met at 2 p.m.

Prayers

● (1400)

[*English*]

The Speaker: It being Wednesday, we will now have the singing of the national anthem led by the hon. member for Madawaska—Restigouche.

[*Members sang the national anthem*]

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

[*English*]

PIOTR RYTWINSKI

Mr. Rick Norlock (Northumberland—Quinte West, CPC): Mr. Speaker, we mourn the passing earlier this week of Piotr Rytwinski. Piotr was well known to Canadians of Polish heritage as a businessman, philanthropist and tireless advocate for the community. He was also well respected by many cultural communities in the Toronto area, especially those of eastern European origin, for his hard work to make their collective voices heard in Ottawa.

Piotr's commitment to Canada led him to volunteer in the 1988 federal election in his home riding of Etobicoke—Lakeshore. Since then, Piotr was an untiring and capable political volunteer, always trying to help the ethnocultural communities develop a stronger relationship with the federal government.

Our government is proud of the strong relationship Piotr helped us develop with the Polish Canadian community, among many others.

I know the House will join me in a united parliamentary voice to express our condolences to Piotr's family, especially his new wife Izabela, as well as the Canadian Polish community. We all mourn and are affected by his loss.

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WIND ENERGY

Hon. Joe McGuire (Egmont, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to draw the attention of the House to the fact that for three hours on May 7 the city of Summerside, P.E.I. was totally powered by green energy. This is the first time in Canadian history that a city has received 100% of its power from wind energy. Power that would normally be purchased from off the island can now be provided locally from three wind farms in North Cape, West Cape and East Point.

I am proud to say that P.E.I. is at the forefront of developing this sustainable resource with 15% of the province's energy needs now supplied by wind power.

With funding provided by the previous Liberal government, in particular, Infrastructure Canada, ACOA and Natural Resources, the Wind Energy Institute and interpretive centre was established in North Cape. The institute is a world-class testing and research facility that develops new ways to harness wind power.

In 2006, after consultations with officials and residents, a private company, Ventus Energy, started construction of a wind farm in West Cape with eight turbines erected in phase I, and 35 to come.

We are proud of the initiative—

● (1405)

The Speaker: The hon. member for Papineau.

* * *

[*Translation*]

NICOLAS SARKOZY

Mrs. Vivian Barbot (Papineau, BQ): Mr. Speaker, today, Nicolas Sarkozy made his official entry into the Élysée Palace, following his election on May 6 as the sixth president of the French Fifth Republic. The Bloc Québécois and I extend our warmest congratulations to Mr. Sarkozy.

We would also like to congratulate Ségolène Royal, the first female candidate for the presidency of France, on running an excellent campaign.

After his election, Mr. Sarkozy stated his position on the Kyoto protocol, saying that the United States had a duty not to stand in the way of the fight against climate change. Let us hope that Canada, as a signatory to the protocol, will take that statement to heart and, like Quebec, make an effort to comply with the protocol.

We also hope that the special relationship between France and Quebec will continue, in the best interests of la Francophonie.

[*English*]

OTTAWA SENATORS HOCKEY TEAM

Mr. Paul Dewar (Ottawa Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the Ottawa Senators may be making history today as they have the opportunity to make it to the Stanley Cup final for the first time in their modern history.

The people of Ottawa could not be more proud.

Senators, like leading scorers, Jason Spezza and Dany Heatley; team captain Daniel Alfredsson; rock solid Ray Emery in net; and overtime hero Joe Corvo; when I think of hard-working senators, I think of those guys.

Maybe even some of our friends in the other place could be inspired by this team. Maybe they will benefit from seeing Ottawa's dogged determination, how they just play their hearts out every night and how they get the job done.

The Senators hail from all over Canada, from Alberta, Saskatchewan, Quebec and Ontario. They even come from Russia, Germany, Sweden and the United States.

If I may say so myself, we are behind the Senators. In fact, the whole country is behind them.

The Speaker: We will overlook that flagrant breach of the rules.

The hon. member for Lotbinière—Chutes-de-la-Chaudière.

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[*Translation*]

NATIONAL MINING WEEK

Mr. Jacques Gourde (Lotbinière—Chutes-de-la-Chaudière, CPC): Mr. Speaker, National Mining Week runs from May 14 to 20. Our mining industry means social and economic prosperity for many communities across the country. I invite the hon. members to join me in congratulating our mining industry during this week of celebrations.

This year's theme is "Canada's Natural Resources: Celebrating 100 Years of Excellence in Mining and Minerals Science and Technology". Through Natural Resources Canada, we are promoting partnerships with the mining industry, universities, other governments and Canadians to continue the sustainable development of our mineral resources.

In addition, in budget 2007, our government allocated $60 million to set up a major projects management office for better regulation of mining projects in Canada.

I ask the hon. members to join me in congratulating mining industry workers and government officials on the work they are doing to support mining communities in Canada and around the world. Together, we will create a climate of hope, opportunity and sustainability that will make Canada a model for the rest of the world.

CLUSTER BOMBS

Mr. Mario Silva (Davenport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Canadians can be proud of the fact that in 1997, the Government of Canada, under the Liberals, hosted a meeting during which leaders from around the world signed the Ottawa convention to ban land mines. At the time, Canada showed the way, and it should do so again now.

Cluster bombs are an insidious problem and are raising more and more serious concerns because they are wreaking havoc among civilians who become innocent victims of armed conflicts. The use of weapons that cause collateral damage by destroying both civilian and military targets indiscriminately contravenes the most basic human rights conventions.

We must all act together to put an end to the suffering caused by cluster bombs. Together, we can achieve this goal.

* * *

● (1410)

[*English*]

VIETNAM

Mr. Deepak Obhrai (Calgary East, CPC): Mr. Speaker, over the past few months, Vietnam has been cracking down on peaceful political activists. Since March 30, seven Vietnamese activists have been found guilty in four trials and given jail sentences ranging from three years to eight years for spreading propaganda against the state.

These actions violate the principles of freedom of expression and tolerance for peaceful opposition. Canada calls on the Government of Vietnam to release all political prisoners and to respect the international standards for human rights to which it has freely adhered.

Vietnam has a duty as an ASEAN member country and an increasingly engaged member of the international community to respect these fundamental rights.

Canada urges the Vietnamese government to respect an individual's right to a fair trial. The promotion and protection of human rights forms the central part of Canada's relationship with Vietnam.

Canada will, therefore, continue to urge Vietnam to ensure that the right to freedom of expression and due process are fully respected.

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[*Translation*]

GENETICALLY MODIFIED ORGANISMS

Mr. Marcel Lussier (Brossard—La Prairie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, students from Notre-Dame-St-Joseph de La Prairie elementary school have come to Parliament Hill today to ask for mandatory labelling of genetically modified organisms.

After gathering information from the available literature and websites, Thomas Drolet and James Cameron created their own website where people can learn more about this.

In record time, nearly 2,000 people signed the petition against GMOs, half of them on the Internet. The purpose of the petition is to draw the government's attention to the negative and unknown effects of GMOs on the food chain and the environment.

Soon, I will table the petition on their behalf.

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[*English*]

LINCOLN ALEXANDER DAY

Mr. David Sweet (Ancaster—Dundas—Flamborough—Westdale, CPC): Mr. Speaker, February is Black History Month and the third Monday is Heritage Day across Canada. Now a bill has been introduced in Queen's Park to make the third Wednesday of February in Ontario, Lincoln Alexander Day.

Lincoln MacCauley Alexander is well known for his compassion, charisma, hard work and generosity. He sat in this House as an MP for Hamilton, was a Lieutenant Governor of Ontario, is a Companion of the Order of Canada and a Member of the Order of Ontario.

Linc's credentials are far too long for me to list in their entirety in the brief time I have. One that does need to be mentioned is that last June, Linc was named the greatest Hamiltonian of all time. Daily, when I use the Lincoln Alexander Parkway when I am back in the riding I represent, I think of all the values that Lincoln Alexander still stands for today.

No one single person who I know embodies black history and heritage as does Lincoln Alexander. In a spirit of non-partisanship, I strongly encourage all members of the Ontario legislature to support Bill 220 and make the third Wednesday in February in Ontario, forevermore, Lincoln Alexander Day.

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STATUS OF WOMEN

Hon. Belinda Stronach (Newmarket—Aurora, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise in the House today to speak to a report released yesterday by Plan Canada called “Because I Am a Girl: The State of the World's Girls 2007”.

The report examines the rights of girls throughout the world, their childhood, adolescence and as young women. An eight point action plan is outlined that would defend women's rights around the world. How does Canada measure up to this eight point plan?

Point one: Listen to girls and let them participate. Over the past year, 12 out of the 16 regional offices for the Status of Women have been closed.

Point two: Invest in girls and young women. The government has changed the mandate of the women's program and removed equality.

Point three: Change and enforce the law. The government has cut the court challenges program and funding to the National Association of Women and the Law.

Point four: Change attitudes. The government is listening to regressive groups like REAL Women and not promoting a progressive agenda focused on women's rights.

Point five: Have a safety net for girls. It also cut one-fifth of the Status of Women's operational budget before being forced to reinstate the funding.

Point six: Get specific data on girls.

Point seven: Take a life cycle approach.

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AWARD FOR TEACHING EXCELLENCE

Mr. Gord Brown (Leeds—Grenville, CPC): Mr. Speaker, earlier this year I had the opportunity to present a Prime Minister's Award for Teaching Excellence to David Sheridan at Thousand Islands Secondary School in Brockville.

His peers make the following comments about him: a community minded arts teacher with a flair for inspiring students to reach their true potential; and he is an innovator who has a unique ability to get students excited about learning and engaged in learning.

David Sheridan moves classroom instruction to practical reality. The work produced by him and his students can be found throughout the city of Brockville and area as they have created legacies, from statues to murals, in their own community.

Visiting Ottawa today with his family, I am proud to take this opportunity to recognize in the House David Sheridan and his many accomplishments.

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● (1415)

SRI LANKA

Mr. Peter Julian (Burnaby—New Westminster, NDP): Mr. Speaker, for over 20 years, the nation of Sri Lanka has been embroiled in a deadly armed conflict.

Today, the violence continues, breeding widespread human rights abuses. Over 65,000 lives have been claimed and hundreds of thousands of citizens have been displaced or have fled the country. Families are being cut off from food, water and medicine. Political disappearances, forced evictions and the recruitment of child soldiers are daily occurrences. Freedom of speech has been choked by the recurring abduction and murder of journalists.

I was at a community meeting in Burnaby last weekend and the message from my constituents is clear. It is imperative for peace that the federal government increase pressure on the Sri Lankan government and military to respect the human rights of the Tamil population and other minorities.

I urge the government to actively support the peace process and efforts of the United Nations to uphold human rights of all peoples in Sri Lanka.

* * *

HOCKEY

Mr. Ken Boshcoff (Thunder Bay—Rainy River, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this past weekend residents of my riding of Thunder Bay—Rainy River beamed with pride as Thunder Bay's own Staal brothers exhibited their superb hockey skills.

Jordan and Eric Staal won the gold medal with Team Canada at the World Hockey Championships in Russia.

The win is a historic one as Jordan and Eric became the first brother combination to ever win gold medals for Canada since our participation in the event began. Jordan is also the youngest Canadian ever to win a gold medal at the tournament.

In the OHL, their younger brother, Marc of the Sudbury Wolves, was awarded the Wayne Gretzky Award as the Most Valuable Player of the Rogers Championship Series.

The youngest sibling, Jared, is anxiously awaiting his chance to join his brothers in the big leagues.

Please join me in recognizing the Staal brothers of Thunder Bay—Rainy River on their superb hockey excellence and in wishing them continued success.

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[*Translation*]

VALLEYFIELD CURLING CLUB

Mrs. Claude DeBellefeuille (Beauharnois—Salaberry, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I would like to congratulate John Stewart, Jean-Marc, Denis and Raymond McSween as well as Claude Comeau, the proud representatives of Quebec at the Canadian senior men's curling championships held in Trois-Rivières from March 18 to 25. The Valleyfield Curling Club represented Quebec magnificently and with honour at these championships. They competed against the best senior teams from other provinces.

This club was established 100 years ago and is known for the quality of its organization, its development of new curlers, and the importance it places on having a club where the well-being of its members is the primary focus.

In addition, this club is a model of social commitment and solidarity in its community as it supports the Special Olympics curling team. The club has showcased these athletes and provides them with tangible encouragement to maintain the excellence of their play.

Once again, bravo and congratulations to the senior athletes of the Valleyfield Curling Club for their participation in this important championship.

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[*English*]

SUMMER JOBS PROGRAM

Hon. Mark Eyking (Sydney—Victoria, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, students in my riding are being denied opportunity. The Canada summer jobs initiative has eliminated the chance for hundreds of students to gain work experience.

In my riding of Sydney—Victoria previous governments have assisted thousands of students with summer jobs. Cuts to the Canada summer jobs program mean hundreds of students in my riding are now without work.

This program was supposed to give priority to organizations in areas of high unemployment. Day cares, museums, recreation programs, minor sports leagues, seniors clubs and small retail operations in remote areas all have been denied funding.

The effect this will have on Cape Breton and other areas is devastating. This meanspirited action by the Conservatives is an attack on our economy and our culture. Worst of all, it is a meanspirited attack on our students.

I demand that the minister instruct his officials to immediately restore the jobs that were taken away.

* * *

SENATE TENURE LEGISLATION

Mr. Mike Wallace (Burlington, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Bill S-4, an important government bill on Senate term limits, has been languishing in the Senate for almost a year as the Liberals play procedural games to delay true Senate reform.

Compare that to what happened in the Senate last night. The Liberals rammed their environmental plan, Bill C-288, through a Senate committee in, and wait for it, 43 seconds. This is the same bill that independent analysts Don Drummond, Mark Jaccard and Carl Sonnen said would cause a massive recession with little or no benefit to the environment. This is the same bill that the Liberal leader in the Senate promised Canadians would not be fast-tracked.

That is the Liberal Party for you, Mr. Speaker. It says one thing and does exactly the opposite. In its pursuit of power, the Liberal Party will stoop to the lowest anti-democratic methods it can get away with. They should be ashamed of themselves.

ORAL QUESTIONS

● (1420)

[*Translation*]

OFFICIAL LANGUAGES

Hon. Stéphane Dion (Leader of the Opposition, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Prime Minister is violating the Official Languages Act, section 88 of which requires the Standing Committee on Official Languages to review the report of the Commissioner of Official Languages.

Will the Prime Minister simply designate a new chair so that the committee can do the work required by the act? Will the Prime Minister do this simple thing and behave responsibly?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, according to my information, the Conservative members on that committee support the hon. member for Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry as chair. He is doing good work. The chair and the Conservative members of the committee are ready to get back to work as soon as possible and I hope the Liberal members will do the same.

[*English*]

Hon. Stéphane Dion (Leader of the Opposition, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, will the Prime Minister admit that he killed the court challenges program because he lost a case against the anti-poverty coalition funded by this program, because, thanks to this program, his Minister of the Environment has been unable to close the Montfort Hospital and because, thanks to this program, gay rights have been protected, something that has been criticized by the chief of staff?

Will the Prime Minister stop this personal and vindictive vendetta against minority rights in Canada?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this government certainly has nothing to learn from the Liberal Party in the area of rights.

This is the government that dealt with the issue of the Chinese head tax, which the previous government refused to do. This is the government that is trying to get matrimonial property rights for aboriginal women. This is the government that is trying to toughen up laws to protect women and children in Canada.

We have an important bill before the House, Bill C-44, to give aboriginal people, under the Canadian human rights code, equal status for the first time. The Liberal Party should stop blocking it and support it.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Stéphane Dion (Leader of the Opposition, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, unfortunately, as is far too often the case, the Prime Minister misled the House again yesterday. He falsely claimed that the action plan for official languages, which I had the honour of launching in 2003, had been criticized by the commissioner.

On the contrary, the commissioner said, "The action plan has achieved much of what it set out to do. It has given the new momentum that was so desperately needed to the official languages policy...the federal government must be inspired by the spirit of the action plan...the government has...directly undermined the action plan over the past year".

When will the Prime Minister stop misleading the House? When will he stop playing politics and live up to his role?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I can cite the report of the former Commissioner of Official Languages, who said, "As was clearly seen in last year's annual report, political leadership is in a downward spiral and is running out of steam; it lacks the strength to properly undertake the renewal of linguistic duality announced in 2003".

Those are the words of the former commissioner. This minister has increased funding for linguistic minority programs.

[*English*]

The hon. leader uses the term vindictiveness, talking about the current chair of the official languages committee—

The Speaker: The hon. member for Etobicoke—Lakeshore.

Mr. Michael Ignatieff (Etobicoke—Lakeshore, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the official languages commissioner makes it very clear that the government is undermining bilingualism. Government employees cannot work in the language of their choice. Citizens cannot get bilingual services. Contractors do not respect language requirements on federal jobs. The commissioner puts the blame squarely on the shoulders of the government's appalling lack of political will.

When is the Prime Minister going to demonstrate leadership, respect the linguistic duality of this country and start enforcing Canada's bilingualism laws?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the commissioner's report, as it does every year, overviews all the activities of the government, where the government is failing, where it is succeeding and where there is work to be done. We will examine this and we will instruct the federal administration to improve performance in those areas.

Once again, the Leader of the Opposition talked about vindictiveness. I have to tell the deputy leader of the opposition that I do not have to have the executive director of my party defend the chair of the language committee against his own members.

● (1425)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Michael Ignatieff (Etobicoke—Lakeshore, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, there will have to be considerable improvement. This government has shown a flagrant lack of leadership by cutting more than $100 million in funding for the action plan for official languages, a plan created by my colleague.

Will this government commit today to adopting all the commissioner's recommendations, starting with restoring the $100 million cut by this government?

Hon. Josée Verner (Minister of International Cooperation and Minister for la Francophonie and Official Languages, CPC): Mr. Speaker, between 1993 and 1999, the Liberals cut close to $100 million from the budgets of official language communities, which led the commissioner to say in her 2004-05 report, "Past experience often helps to forecast the future." The changes that the government made when the official language programs were adopted during the 1990s were disastrous.

Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, in his report tabled yesterday, the Commissioner of Official Languages, Graham Fraser, severely criticized the government for its failure to act in the official languages file. Yet, the same day, the Prime Minister decided to halt the activities of the Standing Committee on Official Languages, the very committee that should be examining Commissioner Fraser's report.

Since the Prime Minister surely must have read the commissioners' report, why does he refuse to reinstate the Standing Committee on Official Languages, so that parliamentarians can do their job and hear Commissioner Fraser's recommendations?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, on the contrary, as I just said, the Conservative members of that committee are ready to get to work as quickly as possible, including the committee chair. I hope the Bloc members will do the same.

Mr. Gilles Duceppe (Laurier—Sainte-Marie, BQ): Mr. Speaker, that member no longer has the confidence of the committee, because he did not want to hear certain witnesses. That is a fact.

Yet, one of the mandates of the Standing Committee on Official Languages is, in fact, to hear witnesses. It would have been interesting to invite people from the Montfort Hospital to come and talk about the importance of the court challenges program. Commissioner Fraser also harshly criticized the elimination of that program. Perhaps the Prime Minister does not want to hear any groups that appear before the committee to condemn certain things he has done.

Is this not why he refuses to reinstate the committee?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the committee and its chair are ready to meet at any time. However, it is strange to see the Bloc present itself as a staunch defender of Canadian bilingualism. The fundamental objective of the Bloc Québécois is to divide this country into two unilingual countries. We support a strong, bilingual country.

Mr. Richard Nadeau (Gatineau, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Commissioner of Official Languages criticized the elimination of the court challenges program. The Montfort Hospital and Alberta's French schools have both benefited from this program.

Is the government aware that in order to save 18¢ per year per person, it is taking away the right of women, homosexuals, aboriginals and immigrants, indeed, of all minorities, to equality? Why take away one of the only tools they have to ensure their rights are respected?

Hon. Josée Verner (Minister of International Cooperation and Minister for la Francophonie and Official Languages, CPC): Mr. Speaker, naturally, we are always surprised to hear the Bloc member portray himself as the great defender of minority communities outside Quebec. After all, during one of my appearances before the Standing Committee on Official Languages, he said that he had chosen his country and that that country was Quebec. I too have chosen my country. It is a country in which we promote linguistic duality. It is a country in which we have announced another $30 million dollars for minority communities in the latest budget.

● (1430)

Mr. Richard Nadeau (Gatineau, BQ): Mr. Speaker, if this government really cares about the fate of minorities and francophones, it should explain why it eliminated mandatory bilingualism for senior military officers, why a unilingual anglophone was appointed the ombudsman for victims of crime and why the committee cannot discuss Mr. Fraser's report. It should explain its disdainful and indifferent attitude, which undermines democracy.

Hon. Josée Verner (Minister of International Cooperation and Minister for la Francophonie and Official Languages, CPC): Mr. Speaker, for years, the Bloc was indifferent to official language minority communities outside of Quebec.

In the fall of 2005, the Bloc voted against Bill S-3. We, however, have made a strong commitment to promoting linguistic duality, and we will continue to strive toward achieving that goal.

Hon. Jack Layton (Toronto—Danforth, NDP): Mr. Speaker, this government's lack of respect for the elected Parliament, for us, is becoming increasingly obvious.

It is hindering the work of the Standing Committee on Procedure and House Affairs by not allowing it to vote. It is cancelling important work of the Standing Committee on Official Languages by refusing to appoint a competent chair. Furthermore, it is muzzling the opposition on the motion put forward by NDP on climate change.

Why this lack of respect toward us, the elected members? Why this lack of respect toward Canadians?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the chair of the Standing Committee on Official Languages is a proud franco-Ontarian who is devoted to this country. He does good work according to our members on the committee. It is unfortunate that he is being treated in such a partisan way.

[*English*]

Hon. Jack Layton (Toronto—Danforth, NDP): Mr. Speaker, the gulf between how the Prime Minister says he wants to run government and how he actually is doing it is getting wider all the time.

His members are shutting down committees. They are refusing to allow votes. They are filibustering. We have ministers misleading the House and they are not following the disclosure rules.

The latest move is to cut down the debate on climate change and the NDP's motion to get something done on the issue, cut it down from a day when there would have been eight hours of debate to a day when there would be only two.

Why? For retribution. Why the lack of respect? Is this what he meant by good government?

Right Hon. Stephen Harper (Prime Minister, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I reject every single thing the leader of the NDP has said. What I particularly reject are the personal attacks on the member for Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry. This is a strong franco-Ontarian who has done hard work on that committee under very difficult circumstances.

Our members on the committee have indicated to me that they have no desire to remove him. I wish the members of the other parties would simply get back to work at the committee because the Conservative members want to do that work.

* * *

COURT CHALLENGES PROGRAM

Mr. David McGuinty (Ottawa South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the court challenges program defended minority community rights in Canada. One of the most renowned cases was of course the Montfort Hospital.

We remember how the environment minister kept silent when he was minister responsible for official languages in Ontario. In fact, he tried to shut it down and a whole community had to fight to save the only francophone hospital in the province. The community could not count on its minister but at least it had the court challenges program.

Will the Prime Minister now admit that without the court challenges program the three Mike Harris retreads on his front bench would have succeeded in shutting down the Montfort?

Hon. John Baird (Minister of the Environment, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I was proud to be minister of francophone affairs when the Government of Ontario made an important decision to ensure that the Montfort Hospital not only stayed open but that it was expanded considerably by putting in more long term care beds.

I can tell the House that in making that decision I had the solid support of both the current finance minister and the current health minister as well.

[*Translation*]

Mr. David McGuinty (Ottawa South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, back when the members for Ottawa—Orléans and Glengarry—Prescott—Russell cared about the franco-Ontarian community, they supported the battle to save Montfort Hospital. Since the government decided to eliminate the court challenges program, they have remained silent. This clearly indicates that official language minorities are really not important to this government.

Will the Prime Minister immediately reinstate the court challenges program before another crisis shakes the Franco-Ontarian community?

● (1435)

Hon. John Baird (Minister of the Environment, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the Liberal member wanted to support the Liberal lawyers. On this side of the House, we will support francophones outside Quebec and anglophones in Quebec. Our objective is to provide good service throughout the country.

He slashed the budget for francophone affairs. Our government is taking action to strengthen the best of the official languages programs.

* * *

GOVERNMENT POLICIES

Hon. Marlene Jennings (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the cuts made by the Conservatives last September had a direct impact on many communities across the country. Not only did official language minorities suffer, but also literacy organizations, volunteers, women, the homeless, children and a large number of other groups. They all suffered because of the Conservatives' terrible policies.

Why is the Prime Minister so determined to go after minority communities?

[*English*]

Hon. Monte Solberg (Minister of Human Resources and Social Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the member simply has her facts wrong. In fact, under the new Canada summer jobs, being a minority community means that people get extra attention. Under Canada summer jobs today we are seeing hundreds of thousands of dollars flow to minority communities around this country. We are completely getting the job done for minority communities in this country.

Hon. Marlene Jennings (Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, when this meanspirited government cut $1 billion from its budget, the court challenges program suffered, Canadian women suffered, and adult literacy programs suffered. To make matters worse, the government failed to determine the impacts its massive cuts would have on these groups.

Even the Commissioner of Official Languages said that the government failed to do its homework. It is on page 6 of his report if anyone wants to read it.

Why is the only minority that the Prime Minister cares about his own Conservative minority?

Hon. Bev Oda (Minister of Canadian Heritage and Status of Women, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this government will not take any lessons from the Liberals. This is a government that does not just talk, this is a government that does.

We have done more for women. We have increased the funding for Status of Women to $29.9 million which is more than it has ever had since its inception. We are making a difference right in the communities and in the lives of women. We stand up for the rights of every Canadian.

* * *

[*Translation*]

OFFICIAL LANGUAGES

Mr. Michel Guimond (Montmorency—Charlevoix—Haute-Côte-Nord, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the chair of the Standing Committee on Official Languages, the member for Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry, claims that he suspended the work of the committee because it had become too partisan. His impetuous decision, which was made with no consideration for witnesses who had come from as far away as Winnipeg, forced them to return home without testifying.

In light of this, how can the Prime Minister still say that the committee chair is doing an excellent job, and why is he persisting in protecting the chair?

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the chair of the Standing Committee on Official Languages has done a good job. All Conservatives agree and support the chair. The Conservative members and the chair of the Standing Committee on Official Languages are prepared to work and to attend meetings. It is up to the opposition members to decide whether they want to go back to work or carry on with their procedural shenanigans.

Mr. Michel Guimond (Montmorency—Charlevoix—Haute-Côte-Nord, BQ): Mr. Speaker, in 2004, this Prime Minister stated: "It is the Parliament that's supposed to run the country, not just the largest party and the single leader of that party".

The Prime Minister needs to face facts: he has a minority government and he cannot control everything. If the Conservatives think they can behave in this way when they have a minority, just imagine what would happen if they had a majority and what impact it would have on official languages.

● (1440)

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I repeat: we are prepared to work. All the Conservatives are prepared to work. The problem is that the opposition is engaging in procedural shenanigans.

Oral Questions

ELECTORAL BOUNDARIES READJUSTMENT

Mr. Pierre Paquette (Joliette, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Bloc Québécois is not alone in opposing the bill introduced by the government, which seeks to increase the number of members in this House from 308 to 320. A majority of members of the National Assembly of Quebec also spoke out against the electoral representation bill yesterday.

If the Prime Minister does not want the motion on the Quebec nation to be nothing but wishful thinking, he must withdraw his bill and guarantee Quebec 25% of the seats in this House. That is what he must do.

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in our bill, Quebec will be guaranteed that its current level of representation will be preserved. This legislation will restore fairness. Representation by population will be virtually assured for Quebec, British Columbia and Alberta. As well, Quebec's level of representation will be the standard by which the level of representation for the other two provinces will be measured. This is a strong guarantee for Quebec.

Mr. Pierre Paquette (Joliette, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the effect of Bill C-56 will be that since the Representation Act was passed in 1985, 48 new seats will have been added to the federal Parliament, and Quebec will not have received a single one of them. That is what is called losing political weight.

Does the government realize that it cannot recognize the Quebec nation, on the one hand, and then on the other hand step up the dilution of that nation's political weight in the House of Commons?

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC): Mr. Speaker, contrary to the other parties' proposals, our proposal is based on principles.

First, it is based on the fundamental principle of democratic representation: one person, one vote, each vote to have the same weight, as far as possible. Second, it is based on the principle of protecting the proportional representation of the provinces. That principle was a very foundation of Confederation: representation by population, together with the concept of federalism.

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[*English*]

THE ENVIRONMENT

Hon. Geoff Regan (Halifax West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Governor Schwarzenegger's environmental adviser says that this Conservative government has made the same mistake as President Bush and that these neo-con cousins are asleep at the switch.

Reports out of Bonn say the Bush administration is trying to water down the G-8 climate change statement. It refuses to endorse the most basic of limits. It will not even recognize the UN as an appropriate forum for negotiating future global action.

Could the minister today tell us his position on these issues, or is he still waiting for instructions from Washington?

Hon. John Baird (Minister of the Environment, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canada strongly supports global efforts to reduce in absolute terms greenhouse emissions. For the first time in Canadian history, we have a national plan to actually cope with that.

I can appreciate that for the member opposite and his colleagues this is a sensitive issue.

"I think our party has gotten into a mess on the environment". Do members know who said that? The deputy leader of the Liberal Party.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Geoff Regan (Halifax West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, at the G-8 Summit, France, Germany and Great Britain all argued for a strong statement on climate change. During that time, the Prime Minister, like his friend President Bush, remained silent and Canada's reputation suffered as a result.

Will Canada show some leadership at the G-8 Summit or will it continue to act like mere background scenery?

[*English*]

Hon. John Baird (Minister of the Environment, CPC): Mr. Speaker, for 13 long years Canada was the leader at all talk and no action. The time has come in this country to move and to act aggressively, to finally, in absolute terms, reduce harmful greenhouse emissions.

We have a plan to deliver that. We think a 25% increase in greenhouse gases in this country, the record of the Liberal government, is unacceptable. We believe we can lead abroad, but leadership requires going first. We are going to deliver with real reductions in greenhouse gases.

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CORRECTIONAL SERVICE CANADA

Hon. Sue Barnes (London West, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, jaws dropped yesterday at the public safety committee when Correctional Service Canada revealed that its "financial situation is dire". "We're broke," said acting commissioner Don Demers.

The minister ignores the advice of dedicated Correctional Service Canada officials and blows $3.5 million on a blue ribbon review headed by a Harris Conservative.

Why does the minister not take the advice of his officials and demand adequate funding for Correctional Service Canada immediately?

● (1445)

Hon. Stockwell Day (Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this year's budget at Correctional Service Canada is about $1.8 billion for some 13,460 very dedicated people working with offenders both in and outside of the system.

There was an increase in the allotment to Correctional Service Canada this year of $102 million. That is for two years, so some of that may not be fully reflected in the 2007 budget.

If the member had been able to, as she indicated, lift her jaw from her briefing book and look, she would have seen there is a substantial increase coming in for Correctional Service Canada. Not just that, but I also want to congratulate officials for saving $5.9 million in procurements. That money will go to assisting inmates.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Dominic LeBlanc (Beauséjour, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the Conservative government had a bad day yesterday. Not only did we learn that there was an increase in the number of inmates who escaped from penitentiaries last year, but Correctional Service Canada also reported that it has no more money.

The commissioner criticized the Conservative minister's transition fund by stating that they are having trouble making ends meet.

There are two federal prisons in my riding. Why is this government depriving them of the means required to supervise the most dangerous criminals?

Hon. Stockwell Day (Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Mr. Speaker, first of all, the prisoners who escaped were not dangerous; they were in a minimum security institution.

[*English*]

They took a walk from minimum security and they have returned from their walk. Of course, most of those facilities do not even have fences.

Any time somebody walks away from an institution it is serious, but they have been walked back there, let us say.

I can assure the member for Beauséjour, who always raises good concerns about the system, that there are substantial increases, many of which will go into the two institutions right in his constituency.

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CITIZENSHIP AND IMMIGRATION

Mrs. Joy Smith (Kildonan—St. Paul, CPC): Mr. Speaker, can the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration inform the House of the government's intention to help prevent vulnerable people coming to Canada from being exploited or abused?

Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Citizenship and Immigration, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am proud to announce that later today I will table legislation to help prevent vulnerable foreign workers such as strippers from being exploited or abused.

The amendments will authorize the Minister of Citizenship and Immigration to instruct immigration officers to deny work permits to foreign strippers.

The previous Liberal government gave blanket exemptions to foreign strippers to work in Canada despite warnings that they were vulnerable to forced prostitution and other exploitation.

Thanks to today's amendments, the good old days of Liberal strippergate will be a thing of the past.

ABORIGINAL AFFAIRS

Ms. Jean Crowder (Nanaimo—Cowichan, NDP): Mr. Speaker, yesterday National Chief Fontaine asked for a relationship of mutual respect.

The minister is working on new legislation to deal with specific land claims, but to date there has been no consultation with first nations.

Why is the minister repeating all the mistakes of his predecessors and refusing to work with first nations to create legislation that actually works?

Hon. Jim Prentice (Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development and Federal Interlocutor for Métis and Non-Status Indians, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the hon. member is quite wrong in her question. As a matter of fact, Mr. Fontaine and I met for over an hour on Monday of this week.

The former Liberal government left office with approximately 800 unresolved land claims left in the closet. I think that situation is unacceptable. Mr. Fontaine agrees with me.

I intend to do something about it. I have indicated that I wish to hear from the Ipperwash inquiry, which is to be heard on or about June 1, and I have every reason to believe that Mr. Fontaine will work together with the government in aid of this.

Ms. Jean Crowder (Nanaimo—Cowichan, NDP): Mr. Speaker, talks are not consultations.

The Haida case made it clear that government must consult with first nations before making any decisions that affect treaty rights. Specific claims are all about treaty rights.

Will the minister start showing respect, abide by the Haida court decision and consult with first nations on land claims legislation? What is he waiting for?

Hon. Jim Prentice (Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development and Federal Interlocutor for Métis and Non-Status Indians, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I will leave the fascinating subject of whether talks are or are not consultations for wiser minds than we find here.

For my part, Mr. Fontaine and I did meet, we did discuss this issue, and we are of common purpose in terms of working together on this matter.

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● (1450)

SUMMER CAREER PLACEMENTS PROGRAM

Mr. Michael Savage (Dartmouth—Cole Harbour, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the government has slashed the summer career placements program. Organizations across Canada that for years have depended on funding to hire students are getting the bad news in the mail this week, just like thousands of students have.

Contrary to what the minister says, these jobs were going not to MPs' friends but to students and outstanding non-profit organizations. They are getting nothing and they are rightly outraged at the government.

Status of Women, literacy groups, the court challenges program and now students: who is next on the government's hit list?

Hon. Monte Solberg (Minister of Human Resources and Social Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the member is simply wrong.

First of all, today's students are benefiting from the lowest unemployment rates in 40 years in this country.

It is also a fact that the funding for the not for profit sector has been absolutely preserved.

Even in the member's own riding, the Salvation Army's Scotian Glen Camp, FANE, the Canadian Mental Health Association, Akerley Child Care and the Boys and Girls Club all received funding under the Canada summer jobs program. We are giving quality job opportunities to students and helping not for profit organizations.

Mr. Michael Savage (Dartmouth—Cole Harbour, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, FANE is a francophone organization.

What can the minister possibly have against the YWCA, the Canadian Diabetes Association, the Canadian Cancer Society, the Elizabeth Fry Society, and arts groups, all of which are non-partisan, non-profit organizations across Canada?

Last year the Autism Society of Nova Scotia had seven positions. This year? Nothing.

Organizations like these have a question for the government: "Why is the government shutting us out?"

When will the minister restore full funding to this program? When will he do what is right for these organizations across Canada?

Hon. Monte Solberg (Minister of Human Resources and Social Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I guess the question is why the previous government routinely shut out thousands of groups every year that it did not fund.

The member speaks of autism. I want to point out that the Autism Resource Centre in Moncton will receive $29,000 this year from this government. Previously it got only $9,000.

This government is stepping up to the plate, helping groups that need the help and, more important, making sure students get the work experience that they need to succeed.

Hon. Maria Minna (Beaches—East York, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, Community Centre 55, a charity based organization in my riding that provides services to the underprivileged, was denied funding for the first time in 30 years. Its summer employment program is based entirely on funding from the federal government.

The minister has politicized the summer employment programs by saying that these may not be "clean" programs.

Can he explain to my constituents why programs such as day care and summer camp will be cancelled?

Specifically, what is wrong with Community Centre 55? Everyone in Beaches—East York knows its work. Why did the minister rule it out?

Hon. Monte Solberg (Minister of Human Resources and Social Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this will be a foreign concept to the member, but the minister did not make decisions on these groups, unlike the previous program where the Liberals intervened and directed the funding to their friends.

The member speaks of groups getting funded. I want to talk about the Flemingdon Park—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order. I cannot hear a word the minister is saying. We must have some order. I am sure the hon. member for Beaches—East York is having difficulty as well and she asked the question. We must have some order.

The hon. Minister of Human Resources and Social Development has the floor.

Hon. Monte Solberg: Yes, Mr. Speaker, no more money for Wal-Mart and Safeway, but we are sending money to the Flemingdon Park Parent Association. Twenty coaches will be hired to help with students this year. That is first time funding. It is funding that was never given under the Liberal plan.

We are helping these groups. Most important, we are helping students.

Mr. Rodger Cuzner (Cape Breton—Canso, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the good people of Cape Breton—Canso have been victimized by what must have been an administrative error, because somewhere somebody has lost a zero.

Last summer we had a thousand summer students working. This year it is a hundred. That is a drop of 90%.

These jobs were not Wal-Mart jobs. They were community jobs in museums, theatres and recreation programs.

The actions of the government have hurt students and they have hurt communities. When will the minister restore the funding? When will he act like a hero and give us back our zero?

● (1455)

Hon. Monte Solberg (Minister of Human Resources and Social Development, CPC): Mr. Speaker, apparently his riding has a zero.

I want to talk about his riding. We are providing funding to the St. Anne Community and Nursing Care Centre, the Port Hastings Historical Society, the Al MacInnis Sports Centre, Camp Rankin 4-H, and the Eastern Counties Regional Library. The list goes on and on.

We are helping students and we are helping those not for profit groups.

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[*Translation*]

ABORIGINAL AFFAIRS

Ms. Nicole Demers (Laval, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Quebec Native Women's Association has denounced the federal government's underfunding of shelters located in aboriginal communities. The federal government allocates approximately $150,000 annually per shelter, while the Quebec government gives nearly $487,000. These shelters are vital to many aboriginal women and their children.

Why should aboriginal women receive three times less funding when, according to Statistics Canada, they are three times more likely to be victims of violence than other women?

Hon. Jim Prentice (Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development and Federal Interlocutor for Métis and Non-Status Indians, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the hon. member's question. We have already said that we must protect the interests of aboriginals, youth and women. However, here is the real question. Why does the Bloc Québécois refuse to support Bill C-44?

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MINISTERIAL EXPENSES

Mr. Jean-Yves Roy (Haute-Gaspésie—La Mitis—Matane—Matapédia, BQ): Mr. Speaker, the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons will not stop repeating that the travel expenses of the Minister of Labour and the Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities fully respect all points of the administrative regulations and that everything is in order.

We would like to believe the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons, but let him stop covering up and tell us how much money each minister has spent. Let him make that public, on a sheet of paper. Then we can judge for ourselves.

Can the Leader of the Government in the House of Commons do that?

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as I have said many times, the travel expenses of the ministers are fully disclosed. That is clear. The difference is that the Liberals spent more than the Conservatives.

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[*English*]

AIRPORTS

Mr. Brian Murphy (Moncton—Riverview—Dieppe, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, this government does not care about medium-sized cities. From Abbotsford to Charlottetown, airports like the Moncton Airport, important economic generators to their communities, are cancelling new flights. Why? Because the Minister of Public Safety neglects to rein in the rogue president of the Canada Border Services Agency and refuses to hire the needed customs officers.

We know the government does not care about the charter, literacy, women's issues, child care and summer jobs. Must we now add mid-sized airports and their communities to the not wanted list, to this culture of defeat?

Hon. Stockwell Day (Minister of Public Safety, CPC): Mr. Speaker, there is a core review going on right now to see how much extra is needed in terms of resources to have extra officers to correspond to increased economic growth in certain areas, just as we did in Newfoundland recently. We looked at an area where there was an increased amount of traffic because of a sudden movement upward in economic activity, and because we were able to move CBSA officers around, they were able to have extra flights into that area.

We have also met with people on the Moncton issue.

We are seeing what can be done. It is going to take some time, because there is a certain amount of resources across the country, but we are looking at it.

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THE SENATE

Mr. Joe Preston (Elgin—Middlesex—London, CPC): Mr. Speaker, last night the unaccountable, unelected Liberal Senate stooped to a new low when it used sleazy tactics to ram through its environmental plan. The Senate committee, in 43 seconds flat—

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

The Speaker: Order. The hon. member for Elgin—Middlesex—London has the floor. We are wasting time. I cannot hear a word he is saying. We will have some order.

Mr. Joe Preston: Mr. Speaker, it rammed through its environmental plan in 43 seconds flat.

Canada's leading economist said this bill would cause a massive recession, including dramatic increases in the cost of gasoline, yet the Liberals passed it through the committee without one second of debate. Once again the Liberal Party has shown itself to be anti-democratic and dictatorial in its pursuit of power.

Could the Minister of the Environment tell this House how ramming through Bill C-288 in 43 seconds is undemocratic—

● (1500)

The Speaker: The hon. Minister of the Environment.

Hon. John Baird (Minister of the Environment, CPC): Mr. Speaker, Canadians have become used to sleazy and underhanded tactics by the unelected Liberal senators, but we saw a new low last night. They booked two hours for a meeting but, wanting to sneak off, not do their jobs and go home early, they rammed through a bill in 43 seconds without one single second of debate.

It is time for these unelected members of the Liberal leader's dream team, senators like Tommy Banks, to go back to Alberta, resign, and let the people of Alberta elect real senators to do the job for them.

The Speaker: Order. Perhaps before the next question period hon. members may want to check the rules. There is a prohibition in the rules against speaking disrespectfully of the other place and we are getting awfully close to the line. I know it is a popular subject of discussion in the House, but there is a line.

The hon. member for Vancouver Island North.

Privilege

SOFTWOOD LUMBER

Ms. Catherine Bell (Vancouver Island North, NDP): Mr. Speaker, last week the Minister of International Trade said that the softwood deal was working just fine and there were no further talks with the U.S., but the Minister of Natural Resources claims that the government has proposed an export tax on logs to make them cheaper to mill in Canada. He says that the Minister of International Trade is looking at this.

If the softwood deal is working so well, why is the minister proposing this new tax? What table is he bringing it up at if none exists?

Hon. Gary Lunn (Minister of Natural Resources, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in fact the Minister of International Trade backed the softwood lumber industry in every corner of this country. We saw $5 billion returned to the industry in this country.

There is a clause with respect to whole log exports to the U.S. that allows for ongoing discussions with our counterparts in the U.S. This is something that the Minister of International Trade is pursuing.

We are providing certainties to this industry so it can move forward.

Ms. Catherine Bell (Vancouver Island North, NDP): Mr. Speaker, thousands of jobs have been lost across the country. Mills are closing in B.C., Ontario and Quebec. The Minister of Natural Resources says that logs can only be exported if no one wants them, yet mill operators say they cannot get logs and they do not have access to fibre because of raw log exports.

I ask again, will the minister agree that the exporting of raw logs means the exporting of jobs? Does he agree it must be curtailed? Will he commit to help mills that are struggling and keep value added and manufacturing jobs in Canada where they belong?

Hon. Gary Lunn (Minister of Natural Resources, CPC): Mr. Speaker, there is not one log that is exported from Canada unless it has been given first to the Canadian operators and is deemed an excess log. Every time there is a hearing.

More important, this government has committed $400 million to help restructure the forest industry. It is very well received according to the president of the Forest Products Association of Canada, Avrim Lazar. The association is applauding our efforts and so is the industry.

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FISHERIES AND OCEANS

Mr. Todd Russell (Labrador, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, the government must have known about the severe ice conditions off Labrador and northeastern Newfoundland. All of Canada has seen the TV images of sealing and fishing vessels trapped in the thickest ice in decades. The opening of crab and other fisheries is delayed. Fishers and plant workers have been without income for weeks and the start of the season is nowhere in sight.

The fisheries minister is monitoring the situation. The human resources minister has been sitting on it, the file I mean, for almost a month.

My question for whoever is in charge is, when will the government stop monitoring and start acting? Where is the assistance that fishers and plant workers need now?

Hon. Loyola Hearn (Minister of Fisheries and Oceans, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the preparatory work has been done. In order to be able to develop any program to assist anybody, we need to gather the appropriate information.

It would be a lot more beneficial for all of us if people like him who complain would provide some information on behalf of their constituents instead of just complaining.

* * *

● (1505)

[*Translation*]

THE ENVIRONMENT

Mr. Steven Blaney (Lévis—Bellechasse, CPC): Mr. Speaker, yes, our new government is taking concrete measures to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and atmospheric pollution.

Yesterday, the ministers of transport and of the environment announced the signing of a memorandum of understanding with the Railway Association of Canada to reduce greenhouse gas emissions in this country.

Can the Minister of Transport give us the details of this memorandum and tell us how it will improve the health of Canadians and Quebeckers?

Hon. Lawrence Cannon (Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as a matter of fact, this agreement will immediately reduce atmospheric pollutants and greenhouse gases. By the end of this agreement, in 2010, energy efficiency will be improved by 44% compared to 1990.

However, our constructive approach is in contrast to the Liberal approach. Yesterday, as we have heard, they passed Bill C-288 in 43 seconds, and they did that without calling a single witness. Our approach saves thousands of jobs compared to theirs.

[*English*]

The Speaker: That will conclude question period for today.

The hon. member for Ottawa South is rising on a question of privilege.

* * *

PRIVILEGE

ALLEGED CONDUCT OF MEMBER FOR OTTAWA—ORLÉANS

Mr. David McGuinty (Ottawa South, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to raise with you in the House an occurrence that is deeply troubling to me as an individual member of Parliament. It is the first time that I have experienced this kind of occurrence in my three short years as a member of Parliament.

During question period the member for Ottawa—Orléans physically crossed the floor and began screaming at me immediately after I posed my second question during question period.

I believe this is a serious question of privilege, Mr. Speaker. The member was clearly out of control, using unparliamentary language and in a threatening fashion grabbed my left shoulder and only left my side when several of my colleagues urged him to stop and to leave, but he would not.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

Mr. David McGuinty: He was clearly completely out of control, raising his voice, flailing his arms, gesticulating in a threatening fashion and making wild accusations.

Some hon. members: Oh, oh!

● (1510)

The Speaker: Order. We have to be able to hear the question of privilege. The member has been recognized as having the floor to explain his question of privilege. We will have some order. The hon. member for Ottawa South.

Mr. David McGuinty: As I was saying, Mr. Speaker, even at the urging of the colleagues around me, he simply would not stop. He would not leave until he realized that he was being video filmed just as my colleague, the member for Notre-Dame-de-Grâce—Lachine, was rising to speak. He then ran out of the camera's range because he was being caught by the camera lens.

This is not the first time that we have seen this kind of occurrence during this Parliament. This happened once before with the member for Nepean—Carleton who crossed the floor to threaten the member for Mississauga South. He was subsequently forced by you, Mr. Speaker, to withdraw his remarks and publicly apologize.

This is a serious occurrence in an instant when I felt for the first time in my young parliamentary career threatened by a member of the House.

There is clearly enough here, in my view, to warrant a question of privilege. I would submit, Mr. Speaker, that if you examine the video footage which was captured here on tape, you will see the occurrence. I also think this is a particularly egregious and serious matter because the member is the Deputy Chair of Committees of the Whole of this House of Commons.

An hon. member: An officer of this House.

Mr. David McGuinty: He is an officer of the House of Commons and his obligation is to conduct himself with the highest integrity. Not only is he one of us as a member of Parliament, he is entrusted with a special responsibility of upholding a code of conduct, of upholding the rules, of upholding a type of practice as a member of Parliament that we should all be aspiring to replicate.

I would expect, Mr. Speaker, in this case, that you investigate this matter, that you review the tapes and that you see that this is again part of a pattern of conduct. When the government does not like what it hears, it dispatches members of Parliament across the floor to threaten members of Parliament. It is a serious matter, the kind of matter that we might expect in some of the developing countries in which I spent much of my career, but certainly not here in the House of Commons of Canada. I believe if you check with other colleagues who sit around me as well, they can verify that every single word I have pronounced here this afternoon is in fact true.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Michel Guimond (Montmorency—Charlevoix—Haute-Côte-Nord, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I believe that the Conservative reaction to this very serious question of privilege raised by my colleague for Ottawa South clearly shows what this party thinks of the rules of this House.

On this side of the House, we also witnessed the conduct of the member for Ottawa—Orléans who, moreover, is the Deputy Chair of Committees of the Whole of the House. Even though he is a chair occupant, he must retain the confidence of this House accorded to him in that role of Deputy Chair of Committees of the whole, just as you must carry out your responsibilities, which, I might add, you do properly.

I will quote from the second edition of Professor Maingot's *Parliamentary Privilege in Canada*, on page 230, where he deals with the right of members to speak freely in this House and in committee, without any obstruction or intimidation. The conduct of the member for Ottawa—Orléans and Deputy Chair of Committees of the Whole is an act of intimidation directed at the member for Ottawa South, who was only doing his job as a parliamentarian. I quote from Maingot:

> Members are entitled to go about their parliamentary business undisturbed. The assaulting, menacing, or insulting of any Member on the floor of the House or while he is coming or going to or from the House, or on account of his behaviour during a proceeding in Parliament, is a violation of the rights of Parliament.

This quote from Maingot concludes as follows:

> Any form of intimidation...of a person for or on account of his behaviour during a proceeding in Parliament could amount to contempt.

The conduct we saw from this side of the House is very serious and, to some extent, calls into question whether the member for Ottawa—Orléans has the legitimate moral authority to occupy the chair when you are not in it. I refer you to your responsibilities as Speaker of the House. Page 79 of Marleau and Montpetit clearly describes the authority of the speaker.

> A further limitation on the freedom of speech of Members is provided by the authority of the Speaker under the Standing Orders to preserve order and decorum, and when necessary to order a Member to resume his or her seat—

In conclusion, I believe you should take a serious look at this matter and remember that when we ask a question in this House—whether or not the government likes the question—it is our privilege to do so, as we are representing the people who elected us democratically, even though there are people here who think that it is not partisan.

As I said yesterday, this is not a bridge club. We have people to represent. The member for Ottawa South was just representing the people in his riding who elected him democratically. And he has the right to do so unimpeded, just as the member for Ottawa—Orléans, who is the deputy chair of committees of the whole, has done.

We ask that you conduct a thorough investigation.

● (1515)

Mr. Royal Galipeau (Ottawa—Orléans, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am glad that somebody raised a question of privilege. In fact, if anyone's privilege has been breached, the member for Ottawa—Orléans' has. The members of this House are well aware that since I have been carrying out the role that my voters and all members assigned to me on April 5 of last year, I have tried to maintain the greatest possible degree of impartiality, without partisanship and without attacking any member of this House, regardless of party affiliation.

I must say that today, I was very surprised to hear the member for Ottawa South attack me personally when I was not in a position to defend myself. Because I respect the impartiality of the position to which the House has appointed me, I do not engage in partisanship. I find the double standard a bit strange.

The fourth paragraph on page 522 of Marleau and Montpetit's *House of Commons Procedure and Practice* reads as follows:

> Remarks directed specifically at another Member which question that Member's integrity, honesty or character are not in order.

The honourable member for Ottawa South specifically cast aspersions on the reputation of two members of the governing party, including the reputation of a chair occupant who, of course, was unable to defend himself. I went over to the member for Ottawa South, who is, as it happens, an old friend, to tell him that I thought that was a bit low. That's all.

There is no doubt that there was a breach of privilege and it just so happens that the member whose privilege was breached is the one talking to you now, the member for Ottawa—Orléans.

● (1520)

[*English*]

Hon. Ralph Goodale (Wascana, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, there can be no doubt that the physical accosting of one member of Parliament by another amounts to contempt of Parliament and it amounts certainly to a question of privilege.

It does not matter what members think of the questions asked or the answers given. When the reaction of a member of Parliament amounts to a physical approach in an intimidating manner and a physical accosting, that does cross the line.

Mr. Speaker, I do not think this matter can rest where it is at the present time. I think it is important that you review the record, including the tapes of the proceedings, not only because this involves a dispute between two members of Parliament, but because one of those members of Parliament is in fact an officer of the House, an officer responsible, at least in part, for the decorum in the House.

If what has been alleged here in fact transpired, although I was not a personal witness to it but obviously many members of Parliament were, I believe, therefore, it is absolutely unacceptable to leave this situation hanging in the air. It must be further adjudicated by you, Mr. Speaker, and I would simply want to advise the Chair that if you do find that there is here a prima facie case of privilege, then the member for Ottawa South would be prepared to move the appropriate motion.

Hon. Peter Van Loan (Leader of the Government in the House of Commons and Minister for Democratic Reform, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I did not intend to speak because I did not witness the incident that was alleged. However, I see that did not stop the Liberal House leader from speaking to the matter in any event, so I thought I might add what I have to say.

First, the member for Ottawa South misrepresented the circumstances in a quite obvious fashion. He suggested that the individual in question, the member for Ottawa—Orléans, crossed the floor to talk to him. All of us are fully aware that the member for Ottawa—Orléans sits on the same side of the House as the member for Ottawa South. That is clear and obvious to everyone.

Second, I think it is of significance, as the Liberal House leader pointed out, that the member for Ottawa—Orléans does occupy a position as an officer of the House. The member for Ottawa—Orléans makes continuous efforts to participate in the House in only the most non-partisan fashion. If everybody looks at his record, he has refrained from participating in any debates in the House for that reason.

The member for Ottawa—Orléans has tried to maintain his position of non-partisanship and yet that did not stop the member for Ottawa South from attacking his character and dragging him into a partisan debate, of which he had not been part in the past, and he was obviously in a position where, if he were to respect that approach of non-partisanship that he has always utilized, he would be entirely unable to defend himself.

I think those are particular considerations that you, Mr. Speaker, should take into account as you consider this matter.

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 think we had a similar incident only about a week ago that was raised on a question of privilege where the hon. member for Winnipeg South Centre approached the member for Selkirk—Interlake, I believe, and not only threatened him but actually indicated that if he did not stop putting 10-percenters in the hon. member's riding, she would then produce a list and a photograph that would bring the Conservative caucus down.

The member for Winnipeg South Centre then subsequently apologized the following day but we have not heard a ruling from the Speaker on the original question of privilege. I see a lot of commonality between what the member opposite is saying, the member for Ottawa South.

I would appreciate your consideration of that fact, Mr. Speaker.

● (1525)

The Speaker: The Chair will examine the tapes and the transcript of the proceedings to see if there is a question of privilege here and will get back to the House in due course. I will certainly be examining the statements made by all hon. members who have made submissions today on this point.

I will leave the matter there. I believe the members involved have had their opportunity to express their views on this and, therefore, that concludes the matter for the time being.

ROUTINE PROCEEDINGS

[*Translation*]

CANADIAN GRAIN HANDLING AND TRANSPORTATION SYSTEM

Hon. Lawrence Cannon (Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to table, in both official languages, a document entitled, "Monitoring the Canadian Grain Handling and Transportation System—Annual Report—Crop Year 2005-06".

* * *

[*English*]

IMMIGRATION AND REFUGEE PROTECTION ACT

Hon. Diane Finley (Minister of Citizenship and Immigration, CPC) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-57, An Act to amend the Immigration and Refugee Protection Act.

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

* * *

INTERPARLIAMENTARY DELEGATIONS

Mr. Deepak Obhrai (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, CPC): 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 Canadian delegation of the Canada-China Legislative Association and the Canada-Japan Interparliamentary Group respecting their participation at the 13th annual assembly of the Asia-Pacific Parliamentarians' Conference on Environment and Development held in Islamabad, Pakistan from February 26 to March 3, 2007.

* * *

COMMITTEES OF THE HOUSE

STATUS OF WOMEN

Ms. Yasmin Ratansi (Don Valley East, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present, in both official languages, the 19th report of the Standing Committee on the Status of Women entitled "Proactive Pay Equity Legislation".

Pursuant to Standing Order 108(2) that the Standing Committee on the Status of Women recommend to the government to immediately introduce proactive pay equity legislation as recommended by the 2004 federal pay equity task force.

* * *

REPUBLIC OF MACEDONIA RECOGNITION ACT

Mr. Lui Temelkovski (Oak Ridges—Markham, Lib.) moved for leave to introduce Bill C-443, An Act to recognize the Republic of Macedonia.

He said: Mr. Speaker, it is a pleasure to rise today to ask the government to recognize the Republic of Macedonia under its constitutional name, which is the Republic of Macedonia and no other.

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

Mr. Paul Zed: Mr. Speaker, discussions have taken place among some members and parties with respect to Bill C-440, An Act to amend the Canada Post Corporation Act (mail free of postage to members of the Canadian Forces), which was introduced in the House of Commons on May 8, 2007.

I believe that if you seek it you may find consent for the following motion, "That notwithstanding any Standing Order or usual practice of the House, Bill C-440 be deemed to have been read a second time, referred to a committee of the whole, reported without amendment, concurred in at report stage and read a third time and passed".

The Speaker: Does the hon. member for Saint John have the unanimous consent of the House to propose the motion?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

Some hon. members: No.

* * *

● (1530)

PETITIONS

VISITOR VISAS

Mr. Michael Ignatieff (Etobicoke—Lakeshore, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise today to present a petition on behalf of Polish Canadians, including many from my riding of Etobicoke—Lakeshore.

The petitioners call upon Parliament to lift the visitor visa requirements for Polish citizens wishing to visit Canada. They point out that Poland joined the European Union in 2004 and that both Canada and Poland are active members of NATO, promoting peace and security together.

The petitioners draw attention to the fact that Poland uses biometric passport technology, which is a secure passport identification system. They also underline that Canadians no longer require a visitor visa to visit Poland.

JUSTICE

Mr. Mike Lake (Edmonton—Mill Woods—Beaumont, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is my privilege to stand in the House to present five petitions on behalf of a substantial number of my constituents, including one family in particular.

On October 14, 2006, Gary and Julie Hunt lost their 16-year-old son Josh in a violent and senseless act. Lacey and Robbie Hunt lost their big brother.

I realize that the rules of the House do not allow me to state whether I agree or disagree with petitions I present. What I can do is recognize the tremendous amount of courage and emotional strength shown by Gary Hunt, as well as the families of Shane Rolston, Dylan McGillis, Nina Courtepatte and many others, who, despite their literally unimaginable pain, are sharing their stories to ensure that other families do not have to experience what they have had to endure.

As one observer noted, these families belong to a club that nobody would ever want to join and yet they have realized the importance of that club and in ensuring that it does not grow any larger.

This petition consists of approximately 3,900 signatures regarding the use of case law during court proceedings.

THE JUDICIARY

Mr. Mike Lake (Edmonton—Mill Woods—Beaumont, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the second petition consists of approximately 4,300 signatures regarding the election of an independent body to govern the code of conduct of judges.

The third petition consists of approximately 3,800 signatures regarding the election of judges by the citizens of Canada.

IDENTIFICATION YOUNG OFFENDERS

Mr. Mike Lake (Edmonton—Mill Woods—Beaumont, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the fourth petition consists of approximately 5,000 signatures regarding the public identification of young offenders who commit violent crimes.

YOUTH CRIMINAL JUSTICE ACT

Mr. Mike Lake (Edmonton—Mill Woods—Beaumont, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the fifth petition consists of approximately 8,300 signatures requesting that the government remove the Youth Criminal Justice Act altogether or at least change it so that serious and violent offenders are tried and sentenced as an adult, regardless of their age.

PASSPORT OFFICE

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to present a petition from the citizens of Timmins. I have presented a number of these petitions in the past. We are still continuing to receive them.

The petition is with regard to the lack of passport services in northeastern Ontario and the fact that other rural regions in northwestern Ontario, for example, have walk-in passport offices but the citizens in my region must take a 12-hour bus ride to get passport service. We are a region that is absolutely dependent on passports because, as a mining sector, we have exploration and international work that goes on.

Whereas the citizens in southern Ontario have readily available, fully operational walk-in passport centres with expedited services, the residents of Timmins—James Bay are calling upon Parliament to approve the granting of a fully operational passport office in the city of Timmins to provide service to the people of northeastern Ontario, and that would include northwestern Quebec as well, to help alleviate the current workload and delays.

FISHERIES ACT

Mr. John Cummins (Delta—Richmond East, CPC): Mr. Speaker, it is my pleasure today to present a petition from concerned fishermen in British Columbia. Their concern is the wording of the Fisheries Act.

The petitioners claim that they have been denied honest input into the drafting of the act and the amendments. They call upon the government to withdraw the bill from Parliament so that appropriate discussions can take place.

[*Translation*]

COURT CHALLENGES PROGRAM

Mr. Jean-Claude D'Amours (Madawaska—Restigouche, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have the honour to present today in this House a petition, signed by the constituents of my riding, on the cancellation of the court challenges program by the Conservative government.

The petitioners are calling for one thing: the full reinstatement of the court challenges program. Recently, the former Conservative chair of the Standing Committee on Official Languages decided not to study the cancellation of the court challenges program, when witnesses were supposed to testify in committee. We also know that the Commissioner of Official Languages, Graham Fraser, clearly indicated in his annual report that the Conservative government made a serious mistake by cancelling the court challenges program.

I believe that the petitioners are absolutely right to call upon this House—and not the government, because we know it is refusing to bring back the court challenges program—to fully reinstate this program to ensure that minorities are respected and have the tools to defend themselves and have their rights respected.

● (1535)

[*English*]

OLD AGE SECURITY ACT

Ms. Chris Charlton (Hamilton Mountain, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to table a petition today with over 2,000 signatures primarily in support of making necessary changes to the Old Age Security Act.

Presently the Old Age Security Act requires a person to reside in Canada for 10 years before she or he is entitled to receive a monthly pension. Although the OAS program is intended to be universal and to act as the cornerstone of Canada's retirement income system, this residency requirement effectively excludes many seniors from its benefits, especially new Canadians.

Therefore, the petitioners ask that the 10 year residency requirement be eliminated and that other programs to assist seniors receive more appropriate government funding.

I am pleased to table this petition on their behalf.

HUMAN TRAFFICKING

Mrs. Joy Smith (Kildonan—St. Paul, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I continue to get petitions from all over the country. I have hundreds of names on this batch of petitions. The petitioners call upon the government to continue its good work to combat trafficking of persons.

As the House knows, this is a growing crime in Canada and a very serious one that we have to address.

ASBESTOS

Mr. Pat Martin (Winnipeg Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I too have a petition from hundreds of Canadians from all over Canada. The petitioners call Parliament's attention to the fact that asbestos is the greatest industrial killer that the world has ever known, yet Canada remains the second largest producer and exporter of asbestos in the world.

They are critical that Canada allows asbestos to be used in building materials, textiles and even in children's toys and that Canada spends millions subsidizing the asbestos industry and blocking international efforts to curb its use.

These hundreds of petitioners call upon Canada to ban asbestos in all of its forms and to end all government subsidies of this killer industry, both in Canada and abroad, and stop blocking international efforts to protect workers from asbestos, such as the Rotterdam Convention.

IRAN

Mr. Pierre Lemieux (Glengarry—Prescott—Russell, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I have a petition, initiated by the Calgary Jewish Community Council, that I would like to table in the House. There are over 300 signatures on it.

It concerns Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad and his government. They have campaigned to delegitimize the State of Israel by among other means Holocaust denial and to incite citizens of Iran and other countries to hate Israeli Jewish citizens. The Iranian government has also given substantial material support, funding and training to organizations recognized by Canada as terrorist organizations for the purpose of terrorizing and killing Israelis.

The Government of Iran and its President Ahmadinejad have publicly and repeatedly called for the destruction of Israel as demonstrated, among other activities, by the parading in the streets of Tehran a Shahab-3 missile draped in the emblem "wipe Israel off the map".

The president is also engaging Iran in the development of nuclear weapons in defiance of the Atomic Energy Commission and the United Nations.

The petitioners call upon the Government of Canada to take all possible measures to prevent the leadership of Iran from developing nuclear weapons or inciting or carrying out genocide. They also call upon the Government of Canada to support and join with international efforts to prosecute Mahmoud Ahmadinejad for incitement to commit genocide in violation of the UN Genocide Convention.

* * *

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, the following question will be answered today: No. 194.

[*Text*]

Question No. 194—**Mr. Alex Atamanenko**:

With respect to the government's policies regarding the implementation of Canada's renewable fuels policies: (*a*) how does the government intend to implement its 5 percent renewable fuels policy; (*b*) which government agencies will be responsible for this program (i.e. energy, environment, agriculture, natural resources) and how will they be coordinated; (*c*) how will the government be assisting established farmers to participate in the renewable fuels industry, in particular those who may not be able to put up anything in the way of an initial investment as a result of an income crisis due to lost crops as a result of drought, flood, and other disasters beyond their control; and (*d*) will the government be introducing an administrative court to ensure that bureaucratic processes occur on time and application deadlines are met?

Routine Proceedings

Hon. Chuck Strahl (Minister of Agriculture and Agri-Food and Minister for the Canadian Wheat Board, CPC): Mr. Speaker, in response to (a), the federal government has been developing an integrated federal renewable fuels strategy with four key elements: a regulation to establish demand; programs to support farmer participation in the industry; a production incentive to stimulate domestic production; and programs for next generation technologies.

Last December, the first two elements of the strategy were announced. First, to stimulate demand the government intends to regulate an annual average renewable content of 5% in gasoline by 2010 and intends to regulate a 2% requirement for renewable content in diesel fuel and heating oil by 2012. The intent to regulate was gazetted December 31, 2006, while discussions, consultations for this regulation and studies will continue to be undertaken throughout 2007.

Second, the government announced that $200 million will be delivered to assist farmers and rural communities seize new market opportunities in the biofuels sector. The $200 million will fund the ecoagriculture biofuels capital initiative, ecoABC, which will help bolster the development of biofuels with farmer participation. EcoABC is a federal four year initiative to provide repayable contributions of up to $25 million per project to help farmers overcome the challenges of raising the capital necessary for the construction or expansion of biofuel production facilities. Program details for ecoABC were announced April 23, 2007.

The government also recently announced an additional $10 million for the biofuels opportunities for producers initiative, BOPI, which helps agricultural producers develop sound business plans, as well as undertake feasibility studies or other studies to support the creation and expansion of the biofuels production capacity. Total funding for this program is now $20 million.

The final two elements of the strategy were announced in budget 2007. First, up to $1.5 billion over seven years will be allocated towards operating incentives for producers of renewable fuels. Incentive rates will be up to $0.10 per litre for ethanol and up to $0.20 per litre for biodiesel for the first three years, then decline thereafter. This program will ensure that Canada's renewable fuels industry remains competitive, and is well placed to meet the intended regulatory requirements.

Budget 2007 also makes $500 million over eight years available to Sustainable Development Technology Canada, SDTC, to invest with the private sector in establishing large-scale demonstration facilities for the production of next generation renewable fuels. These new technologies, such as cellulosic ethanol, will allow renewable fuels to be produced from a diverse range of feedstocks in which Canada has a biomass advantage, including municipal waste, and agricultural and wood residues. The use of these feedstocks has the potential to substantially improve the environmental benefits of renewable fuels.

In response to (b), Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada, AAFC, has overall responsibility for the renewable fuels strategy with Environment Canada, EC, and Natural Resources Canada, NRCan, responsible for contributing key strategy measures.

Environment Canada is the lead department responsible for creating domestic demand through the ethanol and biodiesel mandates.

AAFC is responsible for ecoABC and BOPI, the measures that provide opportunities for farmer participation.

NRCan is the lead department responsible for the production incentive, which is designed to encourage renewable fuels production to meet regulated demand.

NRCan, in collaboration with EC, is responsible for the development of next generation renewable fuels through the funding relationship with SDTC.

In response to (c), the government is providing opportunities for farmers to participate in the renewable fuels industry through the BOPI and ecoABC programs. EcoABC provides capital funding assistance for projects with a cumulative farmer participation rate of 5% or more, so farmers with smaller amounts to invest can work together with larger investors to trigger assistance under ecoABC.

In response to (d), all government programs have service standards in terms of being responsive to clients. However, one of the major challenges facing program administrators is receiving the necessary information from project proponents. Every effort is made to make applicants aware of these information requirements as there is a need to have adequate information to make informed program decisions using taxpayer funds.

[*English*]

Mr. Tom Lukiwski: Mr. Speaker, I ask that the remaining questions be allowed to stand.

The Speaker: Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

* * *

MOTIONS FOR PAPERS

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 notices of motions for the production of papers be allowed to stand.

The Speaker: Is that agreed?

Some hon. members: Agreed.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

● (1540)

[*English*]

OLYMPIC AND PARALYMPIC MARKS ACT

The House resumed from May 15 consideration of the motion that Bill C-47, An Act respecting the protection of marks related to the Olympic Games and the Paralympic Games and protection against certain misleading business associations and making a related amendment to the Trade-marks Act, be read the second time and referred to a committee.

The Speaker: Before the question period, the hon. member for Port Moody—Westwood—Port Coquitlam, the hon. Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Works and Government Services and Minister for the Pacific Gateway and the Vancouver-Whistler Olympics, had the floor. He has 12 minutes remaining in the time allotted for his remarks.

The hon. parliamentary secretary.

Mr. James Moore (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Works and Government Services and Minister for the Pacific Gateway and the Vancouver-Whistler Olympics, CPC): Mr. Speaker, the legislation we are debating today is Bill C-47, which is important legislation for protecting the integrity of the Vancouver Whistler 2010 Olympic and Paralympic Games and also protecting the economic health of the games.

Bill C-47 is a relatively short piece of legislation and it is time limited. It contains schedules that clearly identify the various words, symbols and insignia that are protected as an Olympic and Paralympic mark. It also defines the entities that will be protected by the legislation, namely VANOC, the Canadian Olympic committee, the Canadian Paralympic committee and their partners.

I should also add that in the event that Canada plays host to another Olympic and Paralympic Games in the future, the legislation can allow for new marks to be added to the relevant schedules.

The bill provides for two main types of prohibited conduct.

First, it would prohibit persons from using Olympic and Paralympic marks, any translations of such marks, or any mark likely to be mistaken for an Olympic and Paralympic mark, in connection with a business, without the consent of VANOC or, once the games were over, the consent of the Canadian Olympic or Paralympic committees.

Second, it would prohibit persons from using their own trademark or other mark to promote or advertise their business in a manner that misleads or is likely to mislead the public into believing that their business, goods or services are endorsed or otherwise associated officially with the games, VANOC or one of the committees.

What happens if one of these prohibitions is triggered? That is the focus of the bill.

In terms of remedies, one important area where the legislation differs from the Trade-marks Act is in the test VANOC must meet to obtain an interim or interlocutory injunction against a suspected offender. As many members of the House know, the court normally applies the three part test in deciding whether to grant this type of injunction. The parties seeking it must establish that there is a serious issue to be tried, that it will suffer irreparable harm if the offending conduct continues pending trial and that the balance of the convenience is in its favour.

The bill weighs the onus on VANOC to prove the second part of the legal test and often the most difficult to establish, that of providing irreparable harm. The bill greatly facilitates VANOC's ability to enforce its rights in a fair and balanced manner and will provide certainty to businesses thinking about entering into a partnership agreement with the games.

I should note that due to the timeline of this legislation, it is to cover the duration of the games, period. This exception to the legal test will automatically sunset before the end of 2010.

The waiver of the irreparable harm test is tremendously important. It will make it possible for VANOC to act quickly and effectively in dealing with people and businesses that are infringing on the licensing and partnership program. Make no mistake, there are already many examples of that kind of behaviour. With the legislation in place, the games will have an even clearer protection in law.

Do these protections mean that the Olympic organizers will have a free hand to do what they want, as long as they want? The answer is no. The bill has been drafted very carefully to ensure that it meets the objective of facilitating partnerships for the 2010 games, without adversely affecting the lives of Canadians.

Let me make four points to demonstrate what I mean.

The first point is that Bill C-47 only applies in the commercial context. For example, the use of a protected Olympic or Paralympic mark is only prohibited when it is in connection with a business. This “in connection with a business”, a phrase that is a direct quote from the legislation, was taken from the Trade-marks Act and has been interpreted very narrowly by the courts.

This is important because some of the news coverage that we have seen about this bill suggests that it would be used outside of a commercial context to muzzle citizens' right to free speech and prevent people from parodying the games or protesting the games, but that is not this legislation's intent or effect. Therefore, if people want to parody the Olympic games in a sketch, publish an editorial cartoon, make comments on a website or through a newspaper article, or criticize the games in any way, they can refer to an Olympic slogan or include a photo of an Olympic mascot as they see fit.

The second point is that Bill C-47 has a time limit aspect to it. All the special enforcement measures it confers lapse on December 31, 2010, with the end of the games' year.

The third point is that the bill contains a grandfathering provision that prevents it from applying to anyone who adopted and began using a protected Olympic or Paralympic mark before March 2, the date of the bill's introduction in the House. As a result, persons or companies that are already using an Olympic or Paralympic mark in connection with a business will continue to be able to do so as they had before.

The fourth point is that this bill contains a number of safeguards to protect the legitimate use of an Olympic or Paralympic mark in the business context. For example, a person may use such a mark in an address, in a geographical name of their place of business, or the extent necessary to explain a good or service to the public.

● (1545)

Finally, I am pleased to inform the House that in its capacity as temporary steward of the Olympic movement in Canada, VANOC has committed to avail itself of the special protection provided by Bill C-47 in a disciplined, sensitive, fair and transparent manner and will be issuing public guidelines to that effect in the coming weeks.

I want to comment on one last point on the importance of this debate on Bill C-47, and that is the international context for this legislation. As I said earlier, corporate partnerships have become fundamentally important to major events, particularly international sporting events, and governments have recognized the need to protect the intellectual property rights of the events in order to attract needed corporate partners.

In fact, similar legislation has already been passed in Canada in relation to the 1976 Montreal games. This legislation enabled the Montreal organizing committee to act swiftly in the face of potential commercial misuse of the Olympic symbols, just as this bill does. The kind of legal protection we are proposing in the bill became the norm during the 1990s.

Olympic Games in the United States, Australia, Greece and, most recently, in Italy were all successful by having strong legal protections in place for their intellectual property rights. The coming games in Beijing and London already have passed similar protections into law. Canada can and must provide the same kind of protection through Bill C-47.

People in Vancouver, Whistler, throughout British Columbia and across Canada are looking forward to 2010. We are excited to welcome the world, to showcase our wonderful country and beautiful province to the thousands of visitors and billions of viewers who are eager to see Canadians compete against the world's best athletes and succeed right here on our home turf.

We know, like in Montreal and Calgary before, these Olympic Games will provide an invaluable legacy to our country. Bill C-47 would guarantee that Canada would provide the protection that would allow VANOC to attract the corporate support necessary to ensure that the 2010 Winter Olympic and Paralympic Games are the best we have ever seen.

The games will present Canada in its most favourable light and will energize our tourism industry. These games will inspire a new generation of athletes, the next Pierre Lueders, Cassie Campbells and Beckie Scotts, and provide them with a legacy of world-class facilities so they will become our next great Canadian champions.

Like Montreal and Calgary before them, these games will occupy a unique and enduring place in the hearts and minds of millions of Canadians and citizens around the world.

I urge all hon. members to support the 2010 Vancouver Olympics and our athletes through their support of this very important legislation, Bill C-47.

Hon. Hedy Fry (Vancouver Centre, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I rise to speak to Bill C-47 because this is an bill respecting the protection of marks related to the Olympic Games and the Paralympic Games, and protection against certain misleading business associations and making a related amendment to the Trade-marks Act. That is what this bill is going to do.

Bill C-47 was introduced, as always is the case when there are going to be Olympic Games in any country, to protect existing trademarks, for words and symbols associated with the Olympics and Paralympics. It was also introduced to prevent unauthorized third parties from advertising in a manner that would suggest a link between their business, goods or services and the games. This is known as ambush marketing. This bill is being put forward to prevent ambush marketing.

The House needs to know that for those of us on this side of the House, especially those of us who live in Vancouver, these 2010 Olympic Games are for us an important moment in the life of British Columbia.

I recall being in cabinet when our government supported fully and whole-heartedly these 2010 Olympic Games. I recall standing there and watching our Prime Minister at the time, Jean Chrétien, standing shoulder-to-shoulder with our provincial Premier Gordon Campbell and others, absolutely shouting in glee when we won those games. We have the province, the federal government, business, and consortiums of people in British Columbia and across Canada for whom the 2010 games are an enormous issue for our province.

We know that British Columbia is a gorgeous province. We know that Vancouver is a beautiful city. We all know this. We also know that when Expo came about in the eighties in British Columbia and Vancouver that Vancouver moved from just being a pretty town to being a beautiful lady. We know the 2010 Olympics will actually make this beautiful city of mine a diva on the world stage.

There is huge support from this party, on this side of the House, when we were in government and now that we are the official opposition, for the 2010 Olympic Games. We understand fully and we support fully the principle of this bill that seeks to ensure that the existing trademark protection for words and symbols associated with both the Olympic and Paralympic Games are in fact enshrined.

Having said that, there are a couple of cautionary words that I want to put on the record. When this bill first came to my attention, I thought as critic that I would actually speak with many people within British Columbia, with the Canadian Federation of Independent Business, with athlete's groups, et cetera, to see if this bill was fine, if they liked it as it was, or if there were any amendments that they felt would make the bill better.

I heard some things that caused me to have a bit of concern. For instance, I actually talked with the Canadian Federation of Independent Business and it had no problem with the bill at the time.

I also spoke to many other people. The *Canadian Business* magazine had a huge article on this issue. There is some concern that what this bill is doing is actually changing the important part of the legislation. This bill would remove the usual criteria that has been in existence to date wherever Olympic and Paralympic Games have been held. It would remove the criteria that courts usually require if someone were to bring an injunction against a third party to demonstrate that in fact the games or the sponsors would suffer irreparable harm. That has now been removed.

In fact, this is causing some problems because there may be small businesses and other groups who unwittingly might do something that might cause them to have an injunction if they were to have their property and their goods, that they have been selling, seized without first demonstrating that they have caused irreparable harm and allowing them the ability to actually pay for damages that were done.

First and foremost, I think this is a little bit disconcerting to everyone involved, that people are going to be found guilty and then have to prove that they are innocent. It is completely different from the way the laws are applied. The bill would be seeking injunctions against businessmen and entrepreneurs who work in grey areas.

● (1550)

VANOC, to its credit, has said that it is very sensitive to this issue and that it will use its own good judgment and promised not to use this particular new power indiscriminately or without thinking carefully about it. That is good. I am glad to hear that. I have no reason to believe that this will not happen.

There are those who are slightly concerned. For instance, the *BCBusiness Magazine* was a little concerned about the enforcing of unregistered trademark rights where some general words in the Olympics are now going to be used, words that concern everyone like the simple word “winter”. Used alone, “winter” could be an infringement of a trademark. The simple word “gold”, which is a word that one uses all the time, could be used to infringe on a trademark. The simple word “medal”, or the word “tenth”, may infringe this particular piece of legislation. There are 58 such words and symbols that are going to be brought in and may cause concern.

Many people, especially legal people who have been involved in looking at intellectual property laws et cetera, have asked for some caution. For instance, we have heard from a Canadian research chair in Internet and ecommerce law, from the University of Ottawa Faculty of Law, who has said that experience in other countries during an Olympics suggests that this legislation would create a chill for artists, bloggers, and social commentators who fear that their legitimate expression may lead to a date in court.

What does this mean? What is it going to mean to them carrying on their ordinary work and in fact even asking questions about the games in a blog or asking questions in an email about the games? This could infringe on their rights. This could infringe on their ability to simply put forward any kind of social commentary on the games.

Second, because the bill gives VANOC the power to obtain an injunction to stop the distribution of goods that might violate the law, this provision eliminates the traditional requirement, as I said earlier, to demonstrate irreparable harm. Many people are concerned that they will be found guilty before they have even proven that they will not.

We have heard from a UBC professor, who does intellectual property law, who has said that she has a problem with the games because while everyone understands, and we on this side of the House are in full agreement, that one must protect the interests of corporate sponsors of the games, this is going to make it very difficult for the little entrepreneur who does not have the ability to go to court to support his or her claim in terms of not infringing this property right. This is another problem.

I am going to give the House two examples, one of them is quite humourous. In 2005 a small group was trying to get funds in order to save endangered ferrets. This group organized something called the ferret olympics in which ferrets were going to do feats of daring and out of that this group would raise money to protect the ferrets.

As a result of the 2005 U.S. Olympics committee's changes and protection, the organizers could not call their games the ferret olympics so they had to cancel them. We heard very clearly that the decision came as a special disappointment to a ferret named Spaz who was actually hoping to win the gold in the ferret olympics. We can see how this, which was well meaning, can have some consequences. This case is humorous but another case may not be.

I have a pizza parlour in my riding called the Olympia Pizza and Pasta Restaurant. Many Greeks use the word "olympics", "olympia" or "olympian" because this is a part of Greek tradition and Greek mythology. The owner has been asked to remove signs from his restaurant because of these coming Olympics. It is alarming because we have found in the Vancouver region alone 15 businesses that use the word "olympic" and have been using it for years, ranging from a real estate office to a boat centre, and actually to a local sex therapist who uses the word "Olympics" in the name.

We have to be careful of the unintended consequences of what in effect is a very good bill and one that this side wishes to support. Of all of the principles that it entails, we feel that there are some elements that should be looked at.

● (1555)

We would like to see the bill actually go to committee. We would like to see the committee ask for witnesses to come forward, not only VANOC alone, but representatives of small business, some of the legal teachers and professors who deal with intellectual property law. We would like to see the actual athletes because we have spoken to Athletes Canada and it has told us that it has some concerns.

For instance, an Olympic athlete living in a small town in Canada will have all of the little sharks in the area wanting to help the guy or the girl to get there and win gold, so they raise money to help the athlete with travel and with all of the things he or she needs. In raising that money, they may hold an event in the city, in the little town, and the event may say "Help Joe Smith get to the Olympics" and "Help Joe Smith win gold at the 2010 Olympics". Right now Athletes Canada fear that it may not even be able to say that because that would be infringing on the trademark. The fundraising that goes on in little communities who are so proud of their athletes may be jeopardized. I am not saying it will be, but I am saying it may be.

I am asking for a bit of caution to occur at committee and that we ask certain groups to attend. Athletes Canada should come and be present as a witness. We would like to ask the intellectual property law people to come and be present as witnesses. We would like to ask small business communities to come and the Federation of Independent Business should come as well as VANOC.

If there are any things that could create negative, unintended consequences in the bill, then we would be able to amend it at committee. Therefore, we will not have some of these negative, unintended consequences, which I know, having spoken with VANOC and having been a strong supporter of the games, is really something that it would not like to see happen.

I do think we would like the bill to go to committee. We would like the right number of witnesses to come to committee, so that this could be dealt with and then we would be able to stand in the House and, in an unqualified manner, fully and completely support an amended Bill C-47.

Right now I support Bill C-47, but with the qualifications that I spoke about. They are simple things to do. With good intentions we can all come to committee and deal with these issues very clearly in an open and transparent manner, get them fixed, get some of the little things that concern people looked at, so that we can be able to finally say that here we go, these will be the best Olympic Games that Canada has ever seen. And of course, Whistler and Vancouver will shine and we will suddenly have everyone wanting to come to a province and to a city, to the most unusual Olympic Games that have ever happened in the history of the Winter Games.

People will come to a place where they can ski on the mountains, and play golf and soccer on the green grass of Vancouver at the same time. I do not think there have been any other Olympic Winter Games anywhere that people could do that because it has always been winter everywhere. People can have winter up in Whistler and come to Vancouver and cycle under the cherry blossoms that tend to bloom in early March and February in my province of British Columbia in the city of Vancouver.

We are proud of the games and support them. We support the intent of Bill C-47.

I would just like to reiterate that we do have some concerns. This did not just come out of the Liberal caucus. We have spoken to business. We have spoken to professors of intellectual property law. We have spoken to many people who would like to have some assurances and some clarification that in fact this will do exactly what it was meant to do, which is to protect the Olympic and Paralympic symbol, but that it will also protect the small business people who are also trying to be part of the games and who want to ensure that their athletes get to do the best they can. They want to join in the support. They want to use with pride some of the things that at this moment they are very concerned that they may not be able to use.

Having said that, I am prepared to answer any questions that anyone may have to ask me and to make it very clear that I hope the bill will move to committee, so that we will get the kinds of problems we are concerned about discussed and amend the bill so that everyone can enjoy what I know will be the greatest Winter Olympics that the world has ever seen. They will be held in a multicultural community having huge cultural and artistic forms of expression, with the aboriginal people of the west coast, a proud people, being there to display the beauty of aboriginal culture along with all of the many other cultures there including the Chinese, Asians, Ukrainians, Scots and Celts, all of whom have a huge role to play in our part of the world.

● (1600)

One of the things that sold us on the 2010 Olympics was that this was not just going to be about winter sports but this was going to be a place where Canada would show that it is the global nation. Canada is going to show that it is a place where everyone from every culture can come together and stand together with common values and experiences while being very proud of that global culture that is theirs. They want to showcase it to the world, to showcase a remarkable city and a remarkable mountain that is Whistler. It can be a winter Olympics at its best with beautiful green grass and flowers as one travels half an hour down from Whistler to see what Vancouver can be like during the winter, green and beautiful.

This is going to mean a lot for Canada. We wish that the games will be successful. We wish to see this piece of legislation being amended in a way that makes it extremely successful.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Luc Malo (Verchères—Les Patriotes, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I listened carefully to the speech by the member for Vancouver Centre. One of the things she talked about was a business owner in her riding who was pressured to remove any mention of “olympic” or "olympia” from signs that had been on his business for years. This surprises me, because Bill C-47 allows businesses to use names related to the Olympics if they have been using them for some time.

I would like the member to tell us who was putting pressure on this businessman. How did he react? Is that the type of witness she would want to appear before the committee, people who, just like this businessperson, were pressured, so they can explain how they have been doing business for years? And how keeping this word in the company name would bring back regular customers? Alternatively, could changing the name for one year cause major harm to his business and its long-term viability?

● (1605)

[*English*]

Hon. Hedy Fry: Mr. Speaker, that is a very good question. The Vancouver Olympics organizing committee, VANOC as it is called, had in fact warned that particular businessperson about the use of the Olympic name, the Olympic rings and torch. He had been using them for quite a few years. I actually ate pizza at his place one time. The point is that VANOC suggested that it would grandfather businesses that are using the Olympic name and symbols but it will only grandfather the ones who had been using them prior to January 1, 1998.

If after January 1, 1998 someone started a business and called it “Olympic”, “2010”, “sea to sky” or any of those things, the business could face some sanctions. This is what people would like to be clarified. Many people feel that while VANOC has given its promise, and as I said I have no reason to suggest that VANOC will not keep its promise, that it will not be indiscriminate and that it would use its judgment. Many people say that they do not know what its judgment is going to be and they do not know what is meant by it saying it will be fair.

The people would only be depending on VANOC's judgment but they would like to depend on the courts as they used to have to do, where it had to be proved that there was irreparable harm being done. People are saying they are going to be found guilty, their stuff is going to be taken away and then they would have to go to court to seek redress. It is the opposite of what it used to be.

Businesses want some assurance that it is not going to happen to them and that they do not only have to depend on the goodwill of the Vancouver organizing committee.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Luc Malo (Verchères—Les Patriotes, BQ): Mr. Speaker, in regard to the organization of the 21st Olympic Winter Games in Vancouver and Whistler in 2010, we are asked today in our role as parliamentarians to take an additional step toward the establishment of clear, specific rules applying to all companies that wish to take part in this celebration. As the Bloc critic for sports, I would like to add my voice to all the others debating C-47, An Act respecting the protection of marks related to the Olympic Games and the Paralympic Games, introduced last March by the Minister of Industry.

I would like to say, first, that this bill will enable the Vancouver Organizing Committee for the 2010 Olympic and Paralympic Winter Games, usually called VANOC, to comply with the requirements of the International Olympic Committee or IOC, with which it has a contract. In order to abide by the rules in the Olympic Charter, VANOC must agree to take appropriate steps to adequately protect the Olympic words and symbols, failing which it could be subject to IOC sanctions. Chapter 1 of the Olympic Charter states that “IOC approval of Olympic emblems may be withdrawn unless the NOCs concerned take all possible steps to protect their Olympic emblems and inform the IOC of such protection”.

The current Trade-marks Act already protects Olympic and Paralympic marks against fraudulent uses, but in view of the considerable contribution from private partners, VANOC would like the House to pass more narrowly focused legal protection in order to reassure all its partners and the IOC. Parliament already passed similar legislation at the time of the Montreal Olympic Games in 1976. In addition, other host countries over the last few years have met the requirements of the Olympic movement by passing legislation to protect Olympic marks. This was done in the cases of the Sydney games in 2000 and the future summer games to be held in London in 2012.

If used wisely, the new legislation will not infringe on the rights of citizens and athletic associations that want to join in the Olympic spirit but will help companies that commit large amounts of money to the Olympic adventure to protect their investment. In order to ensure that it will still be possible in the future to hold similar events, it is important to establish a climate of confidence that encourages sponsors to become involved.

Bill C-47 deals, therefore, with counterfeiters and unauthorized use of the fame or popularity of an event, something that experts call "ambush marketing."

The main sponsors of the Vancouver Games support the early adoption of this bill, since ambush marketing is a form of parasitism allowing an advertiser to try to associate itself with an event or simply to take advantage of some of the advertising surrounding an event without really taking part in it. By facilitating legal remedies for hijacked Olympic and Paralympic marks, the bill will enable VANOC to guarantee exclusive rights to the authorized sponsors and thus contribute to the funding of the event. In other words, as I said earlier, this bill will assure the companies who are becoming partners in the games that their investment will be respected, and also give VANOC additional leverage to raise sufficient funds.

Although we support this bill out of respect for the players in Quebec's and Canada's sports community, I wish to say that we also want to support the small business owners who, without meaning any harm, wish to celebrate the holding of the games in their region. Accordingly I would remind the House that VANOC undertook to use this legislation as minimally as possible, exercising judgment and fairness. Exceptions are also provided for in some cases so as not to hurt companies that may have begun using a term linked to the Olympics prior to January 1998, and the act itself will be valid for only a limited time, that is, it will cease to apply, as provided in clauses 13 and 15, on December 31, 2010.

VANOC also intends to undertake a campaign to educate people about the Olympic mark and it will define clear guidelines pertaining to use of the mark, while encouraging communities to play an active part in the games so that all the potential players in this project, citizens, large corporations, associations and small business owners, feel included in the event and become fully involved in it.

● (1610)

Protecting Olympic and Paralympic marks—including all names, phrases, marks, logos and designs relating to the Olympic movement—guarantees that only authorized sponsors will be able to use them. As a result, no person or business will be able to appropriate them without contributing to the financial support of the games. It is very important to understand that, out of an operating budget totalling $1.7 billion for the Vancouver Games, commercial partners contribute approximately $725 million. Thus, according to VANOC:

> Revenue from sponsors and licensees is critical to the successful staging of the 2010 Winter Games, increased funding for Canadian athletes, and sport and cultural legacies for all Canadians.

I would like to take a moment to examine that quotation. The sport and cultural legacy of the Vancouver Games referred to by VANOC also means that we have to give thought to respect for bilingualism, both in the preparations for the games and during the games themselves. I would remind the House that, in October 2005, a cooperation agreement was signed between the Government of Quebec and VANOC in order to promote linguistic duality and the specificity of Quebec's culture and identity. This agreement also provides that the Government of Quebec will support VANOC in its efforts to guarantee the presence of French at all stages of the games, which is also required pursuant to the Olympic charter, since the two official languages of the Olympic movement are French and English.

I would point out that, despite that agreement, in a report tabled in February 2007 entitled *Reflecting Canada's Linguistic Duality at the 2010 Olympic and Paralympic Winter Games: A Golden Opportunity*, the members of the Standing Senate Committee on Official Languages stated:

> —there are still a number of challenges to ensuring the full and fair consideration of the two official languages at the 2010 Games. The committee feels that concrete and immediate action must be taken to guarantee compliance with linguistic criteria in the selection of host cities, in the provision of adequate funding for French-language organizations in setting up projects for the 2010 Games, in the representation of French-language communities in VANOC and in the cultural celebrations associated with the Games, in the broadcasting of the Games to the entire English and French audience and regarding bilingual signage outside the host cities.

Although VANOC is committed to respecting both official languages, it still has to take the necessary measures in order to keep that commitment. One of the key problems concerns the televised broadcast of the events. We must absolutely ensure that the television viewers are respected, by asking the responsible broadcasters to assure the French and English audiences equal coverage of the events.

These games provide Quebec and Canadian athletes an opportunity to measure what they are made of, their talent, their strengths and their perseverance. For the spectators as well, whether they are attending the competitions or watching them with interest on television, the Olympic Games are important. During this international event they will see themselves in the athletes representing them, they will identify with their challenges and victories and they will be inspired. This sense of identification and pride is achieved by respecting French and its development.

Respecting bilingualism in Vancouver is especially important. Although French has official language status within the Olympic Movement, this status did not stop it from declining on a number of levels during the last games. As Grand Témoin de la Francophonie for the Turin Olympic Games, Lise Bissonnette said, "We should be telling cities which make a bid to stage the Olympics that they must make commitments set in stone when it comes to official languages, and they will have to demonstrate how they intend to meet these commitments". For now, it is deplorable that the linguistic duality of the cities making a bid to host the games is not considered, whether within the International Olympic Committee or the Canadian Olympic Committee.

Looking beyond the confines of the Olympics, the members of the Standing Senate Committee on Official Languages also deplore, in their report, the fact that French and English are not accorded the same status in the Canadian sports system. For example, although Canada's sports policy provides for some measures to support bilingualism, this is not the case for the policy on sport for persons with a disability. According to all the witnesses convened by the committee, a great deal of work remains to be done to ensure that athletes are provided services and support mechanisms in both official languages equally.

● (1615)

Also according to the committee's report, Sport Canada acknowledges that there is still much to be done to ensure that francophone athletes have equitable access to high performance sport. Worse yet, in a study published in 2000, former official languages commissioner Dyane Adam stated that the shortcomings of the Canadian sports system with regard to language were detrimental to the overall development of francophone athletes.

If, on a daily basis, the French language is used improperly or neglected in the Canadian sports world, we must be even more vigilant in order to ensure that it is given its due at the Vancouver Games. Ultimately, French must be integrated into the development of Canada's Olympic philosophy.

According to the Olympic Charter, olympism is a philosophy of life exalting and combining in a balanced whole the qualities of body, will and mind. Blending sport with culture and education, olympism seeks to create a way of life based on the joy of effort, the educational value of good example and respect for universal fundamental ethical principles. Olympism is more than just an attitude, it is a way of life, a mindset passed from generation to generation. The Vancouver Games will serve to promote sport and develop athletes. The young athletes whom I recently encouraged at the Canada Games were inspired by those who came before them and, in turn, will inspire those competing in 2010.

As well, every year, the Quebec Games make a not insignificant contribution to development of the Olympic spirit. Sports-Québec and everyone who contributes to organizing this great coming together are motivated by a desire to pass on the values of Olympianism to young people. This sporting event, an innovative initiative on the part of Quebec, helps to encourage the emergence of the sports elite of tomorrow. The young athletes who participate are, like the Olympians, motivated by an exceptional desire to surpass their limits. They put all their heart, the best of themselves, into every competition. For them, these championships are the Olympics, on their own scale. These meetings are often where they find the motivation they need to pursue their efforts and achieve ever higher objectives.

Because these games are an important step on the road that leads to the Olympiads, I also want to thank the volunteers who commit themselves body and soul to events such as these, and I am not forgetting the host cities, which put vast storehouses of energy into carrying out their mission. Here, I am thinking particularly of the RCM L'Assomption, which hosted the Winter Games last March, and the city of Sept-Îles, where the 43rd finals of the Quebec Games will be held from August 3 to August 11 of this year. In fact, I will take this opportunity to issue an invitation to everyone who would like to come and witness the vitality and enthusiasm that are the hallmark of the next generation of Quebec athletes

When I think about the Olympic spirit, a few names immediately spring to mind. For the Hamelins who live in Sainte-Julie in my riding, speedskating is more than a sport, it is a fundamental part of family life. Everyone in Quebec is now familiar with Charles Hamelin, who won silver in Milan last March at the short-track speedskating world championships. A few days later, he won the world team championships in the same event. Charles also left his mark in Turin in 2006. It seems that before long the name of his brother François will be equally familiar to sports fans in Quebec.

At the 2006 Soirée des lauréats montréalais, François, who already held the national junior 1000 metre record, was named most promising athlete, while the father of these two champions, Yves Hamelin, was named development trainer of the year. The two brothers started skating at a very young age and have benefited from the wise counsel of their father. This invaluable spirit of emulation is the spirit that the Olympic Movement seeks to promote.

Along the same line, the successes experienced today by Charles Hamelin, François-Louis Tremblay, Olivier Jean and Kalyna Roberge, to name just a few, are not unlike the past successes of the great skater Marc Gagnon, who was recently inducted into the Canadian Olympic Hall of Fame. Gagnon, a four-time world champion and two-time silver medalist, and a member of the Canadian team since the age of 15, ended his prolific career after the Salt Lake City Olympic Games in 2002, where he became the most decorated Winter Olympics athlete in the history of Quebec and Canada. After participating in three Games and winning five Olympic medals, three of them gold, he overtook Gaétan Boucher, another iconic figure in Quebec sport. Perhaps even more than the impressive number of titles and medals he collected, it is Marc Gagnon's energy and personality that made him one of the leading Quebec athletes of recent years. It is that spirit that he has passed on to the next generation, so that they can, in a way, carry on the Olympic lineage.

● (1620)

In other disciplines as well, this lineage is very clear. If Alexandre Despaties, a triple god medal winner at the Grand Prix de Montréal just a few weeks ago, is now one of the most highly regarded Olympic hopefuls in Quebec, it is because others have shown him the way. Sylvie Bernier's victory at the Los Angeles Olympics, in 1984, is linked to the success of Despaties, who recently was presented with an international award as best diver in the world, in recognition of his performance in the past four years.

The Olympic spirit is very much alive in the Quebec sports community. Among the people who exemplify this ideal in a very striking way, I would also like to mention the great wheelchair racing champion, Chantal Petitclerc. Since 1992, Chantal Petitclerc has won 16 Paralympic and one Olympic medal. She is the holder of several world records and continues to campaign for recognition of her sport as an official Olympic event. Since 1995, she has been the spokesperson for Défi sportif des athlètes handicapés, which this year included nearly 3,000 competitors. In addition to being an exceptional athlete, Chantal Petitclerc has a gift for expressing the passion that motivates her, so that she is a much sought-after speaker. She was recently included among the list of most-admired personalities in Quebec not only because of her success in sports but also for her glowing personality. Strength, courage, tenacity, balance, and good humour: Chantal Petitclerc is, outside the sporting arena, an incredible source of inspiration.

Before concluding, allow me to salute Christiane Ayotte and her entire team of researchers who tirelessly devote their efforts to overcoming the devious methods of those individuals for whom gold justifies any means and who do not hesitate to put the health of young people at risk in their search for super-human performances. Thanks to their laboratory police work, the great striving for excellence, in the spirit of the Olympic motto, "Swifter, Higher, Stronger", can be carried out in a healthier manner.

While couch potatoes are increasingly taking the step to a more active life, we must provide an opportunity for everyone, on a daily basis, to draw inspiration from the examples of courage and perseverance of our athletes. For that reason, we must give VANOC all the necessary legislative tools for completing the colossal task of holding a modern Olympiad, where financial and commercial interests must be blended as closely as possible with environmental, social and, of course, sporting success.

You will, therefore, understand why the Bloc Québécois will support Bill C-47 in principle at second reading and we will listen with great pleasure to the witnesses who are called before the Industry committee in order to learn more.

● (1625)

[*English*]

Hon. Keith Martin (Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I have a couple of simple questions for the hon. member.

However, before I do that, I have to pay homage to Bob Saunders and the Saunders family in my riding of Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca, Harry Kuiack and others of the West Shore Chamber of Commerce who are involved with sports tourism. Bob Saunders has done a great deal in supporting Olympic grade athletes, and my community owes him and his family a great deal of thanks.

Is the hon. member dismayed that the government is not sponsoring in any way, shape or form the Paralympics in 2010 in Vancouver? For the first time, the federal government is not providing any money to the Paralympics, which is quite surprising given the activities of the member for Cariboo—Prince George who has been a leader on the government side in this area for a long time.

Does my hon. colleague from the Bloc think the federal government should give financial support to ensure that the Paralympic aspect of the Olympics in 2010 in Vancouver will receive its fair share of money?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Luc Malo: Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank my colleague for his very interesting question, which gives me the impression that he wants to emphasize the fact that paralympic athletes are athletes in their own right.

These athletes deserve respect and the means they need to achieve their dreams and make the most of their talent. As I said in my speech, Chantal Petitclerc is doing excellent work to build awareness among all stakeholders, including, of course, the government, as well as the sponsors and everyone else involved in sports, that these athletes are the real deal. What they do is every bit as remarkable as what athletes who participate in the regular Olympic Games do.

Perhaps the entire Olympic Movement should ask itself some questions about recognition for paralympic athletes. I hope that one day the movement will stop creating an artificial distinction between these two types of exceptional athletes.

Mr. Speaker, I am sure that if you or I, who are not physically disabled, had to compete against a paralympic athlete, we would quickly be defeated. Like all athletes, these people train every day and do their best. These athletes must receive the recognition they deserve.

● (1630)

[*English*]

Hon. Keith Martin: Mr. Speaker, there is another aspect I would like to address with my hon. colleague.

In my riding we have an extraordinary organization that is trying to put forth quite a remarkable initiative called "PacificSport". PacificSport by Roger Skillings and others is a collaboration between Camosun College and other organizations within the community. PacificSport is an institute that trains not only high-grade athletes, but it also does incredible research into health care pertaining to sport.

We know that childhood obesity is a major problem in our country. One of the things we could do that would significantly have a positive impact upon the health of all Canadians and diminish our costs in terms of health care would be to put forth a plan with our provincial counterparts in health and education to do something along the lines of keeping and ensuring that physical education would be an obligatory part of children's schooling from K1 all the way up to and including grade 11, which is a very simple thing to do.

PacificSport does a lot of research and work that allows Canadians to have access to these kinds of programs, which could be decimated across the country.

I am dismayed that the government has chosen not to make any financial input into the institution, even though the provincial government of British Columbia has put in a very large chunk of money. It is really a national organization, a national program, that would benefit Canada from coast to coast, and even beyond.

Does my hon. colleague not think the relevant ministers, such as the Minister of Health, should work with provincial counterparts to ensure that the federal government works with the provinces to implement solutions for children from an early age so physical activity would be a part of their schooling from K1 to grade 10? Does he not think this would be a very useful thing, in terms of improving the health care of children and adults, into the future?

[*Translation*]

Mr. Luc Malo: Mr. Speaker, I again thank my colleague from Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca for his question.

Of course, like him, I think that our young people should do more activities, be more active; they should spend less time in front of the television or the computer playing video games. Juvenile obesity is a major blight on society today.

However, I do not agree with him that this should all pivot around a cross-Canada program. In the Standing Committee on Health, when we were discussing the issue of juvenile obesity, we asked our colleagues from all the other parties to acknowledge the efforts being made by Quebec and the provinces in this area, since people's health, sports, physical education and education are provincial matters.

We asked them to recognize this jurisdiction but unfortunately they did not do so. We asked them for this because the Government of Quebec has already implemented a program to try and energize our young people again, to give them more opportunities to take part in sports, to have more sports recreation.

Instead of creating two or three competing programs, it would have been much more logical—and it is still a lot more logical—to give the money to the government that has already put a program in place. This way we could have given the program more force, power and effectiveness. The problem of inactivity among young people, and in all age brackets, exists. In my opinion, the whole population should move more, because movement is what prevents illness. More funding should be given to the government that has responsibility. And in this case I consider that it is the governments of Quebec and the provinces that are responsible.

● (1635)

[*English*]

Hon. Keith Martin: Mr. Speaker, on a related topic, my hon. colleague brought up the issue of children being sedentary too much of the time, which is along the lines of what I mentioned earlier in terms of childhood obesity. It is really unfortunate that we have come to be a society in which children are spending so much time in front of the screens of computers, televisions and other small hand-held devices—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): The hon. Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Veterans Affairs is rising on a point of order.

Mrs. Betty Hinton: Mr. Speaker, although I am very interested in the subject matter the member opposite is discussing, and although I share his concern about childhood obesity, his discussion and his questions have absolutely no relevance to what we are discussing at this time. I would ask that the Speaker rule on whether or not he can continue down this road.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): I will ask the hon. member for Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca to try to keep his questions or comments regarding the speech of the hon. member for Verchères—Les Patriotes as close as possible to the subject matter of the bill. He has a very short period of time to continue his question. Could he wrap it up very briefly and try to keep it to the actual subject matter of the bill?

Hon. Keith Martin: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. I hope that my hon. colleague will give me enough time, more than 15 seconds, to ask my question and make it relevant to the issue at hand.

As I was saying, it is unfortunate that we have a society in which children are spending so much time in front of screens, computers, hand-held devices and television sets. They need to spend a lot more time outside in a physically active environment, particularly with their parents or with an adult caregiver on an ongoing basis and, better yet, with children simply acting in play.

Does my hon. colleague not think this would be a great opportunity for the federal government, as we are talking about the Olympics today, to engage with its provincial counterparts in health and education to have a full-court press for making sure that children spend a lot of time being more active and less time in front of a screen?

[*Translation*]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Andrew Scheer): The member for Verchères—Les-Patriotes has only 30 seconds to respond.

Mr. Luc Malo: Mr. Speaker, I can give essentially the same answer that I gave to the member for Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca in response to his previous question—it is Quebec and the provinces that are responsible.

[*English*]

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to speak to Bill C-47, which has been introduced by the government to deal with trademark protection for the 2010 Vancouver Olympic and Paralympic Games. I have been working very closely with my colleagues from British Columbia, because this will be a unique moment in the history not just of our country but in particular of the people of the west coast, and I would like to speak to that.

I feel that it is always incumbent upon politicians to address their biases up front so that the people back home know where they are coming from. There is certainly a tendency for politicians to identify themselves with sports and to be seen with regard to sports, partly because people like sports a lot more than they like politicians, which is I think a good example of how the average person's wisdom tends to be fairly sharp.

When I was a boy in Timmins, we seemed to not exist anywhere on the planet. Culturally we never heard our voices mentioned on national television. We never heard ourselves on radio. The only time we ever saw a reflection of who we were was on Saturday night with the Montreal Canadiens and Frank Mahovlich playing. Frank Mahovlich was from Shumacher. We felt we were someplace on the world map because of Frank Mahovlich or Bill Barilko or the Kreiner sisters, who were such fantastic Olympians.

I cannot claim any share of that great sporting heritage from northern Ontario. I would not claim to be the worst hockey player ever put out in northern Ontario in the city of Timmins, but if we classified the 10 worst athletes ever put out in northern Ontario, I might be one of them. In fact, I remember as a little boy coming home to my father saying that I could not catch a baseball. I could not score a goal. I was pretty good at dirty cheap shots, but I have certainly grown out of that, and I think most of my colleagues will agree.

I remember asking my father why it was that in an area that produced so many great athletes the Angus family was so bereft of the most basic skills of eye-hand coordination. My father said, "Son, it's been like this for generations. When God was giving out eye-hand coordination, the Anguses were in another room getting a drink".

I feel it is incumbent upon me to at least be honest with the people here and back home. I would never, ever claim any ability to win anything in the world of sports, but that does not mean I do not appreciate it.

When we are talking about the Olympics, we are talking about an event that brings us the best of our young athletes and the best of that spirit from around the world. However, we are also talking about what it does to a city. A city is forever changed by the Olympics. It is changed in the minds of the international community.

Let us think of the experiences in Calgary and Montreal. It will be the same for Vancouver. I think so much about the city of Sarajevo, which was such a symbol of international goodwill and of a cosmopolitan coming together. The tragedy of Sarajevo afterwards was very much marked because of our impression of it through the Olympics and the lost promise there.

The impact that the 2010 Olympics will have on Vancouver and the Whistler area will be phenomenal for the region of British Columbia. It certainly will be an event that will propel Vancouver's place in the 21st century. As government and parliamentarians, we certainly have a serious role to play in ensuring that these games are the most successful possible.

We have only to look back to the experience of the Montreal Olympics. Certainly from Expo but then from the Olympics, Montreal really was identified forever as an international city because of those events. However, Montreal also was remembered, at least in Canada, for Mayor Drapeau's famous baby that he delivered in the form of the massive debt he ended up with.

After that, cities and governments always had to contend with how to ensure that they promote a successful Olympics. How do they compete with every other Olympics? Every Olympics has to be the best there ever was. There is incredible pressure on a country, a region and a city to deliver something that the previous Olympics did not, to deliver so that in this age of 24-7 television and international attention, Vancouver, the Vancouver area and by extension all of Canada will shine.

● (1640)

There is an issue in terms of the financial costs. The costs are enormous. As parliamentarians we have to ensure that we are doing our utmost to make it possible for VANOC to work with the International Olympic Committee and Paralympic Committee to deal with sponsorship issues.

I am going to be speaking to Bill C-47 today because I think it is an important bill. We have to deal with the issues of bootleg products and ambush marketing to ensure that there is a good business climate so that people who do invest in the games will not be unfairly undermined.

However, at the same time, as with anything in terms of trademark or copyright law, we have to look at balancing the issues. Legislation is a blunt instrument. When we bring legislation forward, especially legislation that tries to cover off the minutia and the details that this legislation does, we are creating a very large and cumbersome body, and it can have unintended consequences. We see that with any bill that comes forward.

We have to reflect and make sure that we provide the tools to prevent the unfair ambush marketing that will undermine the value of the sponsorships. We are looking at a massive amount of money having to be brought forward by the private sector. The corporations that invest certainly have a right to be protected from the unfair bootlegging of Olympic logos by people who do not want to pay.

At the same time, as I say, in any trademark or copyright issue it is a balancing act. We have to ensure that the legislation we bring forward here will not have unfair and unintended consequences for small organizations and for small mom-and-pop operations. We have to ensure that the legislation we bring forward will not prevent citizens within Vancouver, Whistler or anywhere in Canada from partaking in a debate or discussion without facing unfair litigation or going to court to prove they really were not infringing on trademarks.

We have to look at how we can balance these two issues, because we see an extremely wide array of trademark issues and words put forward as being under protection. There are something like 75 being proposed for the Whistler games while there were only three for Montreal. That is a major change.

Words such as "tenth", "winter" and "Vancouver" will be subject to a form of trademark protection. How will we ensure they are used fairly? We would understand if the five Olympic rings were being used by some burger chain in competition with a much bigger burger chain that actually paid to use them.

There is certainly an argument to be made that using the five rings and saying, "Come and get our Olympic fries", would be an infringement. However, what about using specific words like "twenty-first" and "Vancouver"? How do we ensure average and fair use? Fair use is a legal term in any copyright issue. How does this legislation not impede the fair use of words like "twenty-first" and "Vancouver"?.

I am particularly concerned about the logo that was chosen, the inukshuk, which I think is an amazing symbol. It has become a symbol of Canada, but it is primarily a first nation symbol. It comes from our far north. It has become a symbol of the Olympics. Suddenly this symbol from our first nation people has been appropriated, in a sense, as being under trademark protection.

People see this symbol if they travel anywhere in northern Canada, not just in Inuit lands or in the far Arctic. It has become a common symbol. It is a symbol that everyone uses. I am very concerned that it is suddenly being given patent protection as an Olympic symbol when in fact it has been a symbol within the communities of the first nation peoples for I would not even venture to guess how long. I definitely have a concern about that and it has been raised within the NDP caucus.

We have a concern about the overall intent in terms of trying to be so specific. I appreciate the comments made by the Conservative member who spoke earlier and said that this will be applied only for commercial abuse. Public satire, public discourse, blogging, et cetera will not be impeded. This again shows the intent of a balance, but we have to see it in the legislation in order to feel comfortable that we are going after the unfair bootlegging use of symbols that are quite rightly trademarked.

● (1645)

One of the concerns I have is that law is based on precedent and we are setting up a massive tent for a short period of time with a sunset on how long we will not be allowed to use the word "Vancouver", "tent", "winter" or "gold". However, under that tent, we are moving all the yardsticks fairly dramatically on Canadian trademark law and policy. It also affects copyright issues because this would be the single largest change in trademark law in the last 50 years. Essentially what it says is that if there is a perceived abuse of the trademark by someone then that person must stop using it immediately. The onus would then be on that person to prove that he or she was not abusing the trademark.

We saw similar attempts brought forward under the famous Bulte report on heritage in terms of copyright legislation where a suggestion was brought forward that if one felt that a website unfairly infringed on one's copyright material, that website would need to be shut down immediately. The reverse onus on someone to prove that he or she has not done something wrong is troubling. The person could say that he or she was just doing it for the duration of the Vancouver Games and then he or she will fold up the tent and everything will go back to normal, but we have set precedents at that point on how we establish trademark law in this country.

There have been some public critics of Bill C-47 who have said that we are looking at creating special interest law for a short period of time and then they will move that tent to another area.

On the larger issue of trademark law and copyright law, I know there has been much debate over the last number of years on where Canada needs to go and whether or not we are some kind of outrageous pirate haven for bootleg copies, as certain lobbyists have attempted to say, or whether we need to start building a 21st century legislative framework to deal with trademark and copyright issues in a digital age. Those are certainly issues that we need to discuss.

I am looking at Bill C-47 in terms of the larger issue of how we establish and protect the rights of businesses to invest in something as important as the Vancouver Games and how we also assess the potential impact on a mom and pop operation that wants to have gold and silver coffee at their little coffee shop in northern B.C. and whether or not their rights will be unfairly infringed upon.

We have been promised these rights by the VANOC committee and, I would like to believe, that it will be very judicious in their use, which is certainly comforting. However, it is a question that we would need to ask.

If we provide a large and wide interpretation of anything that could possibly be seen as potential abuse and then expect that it will only be used in certain circumstances, once we have given those rights to go after potential infringers, my sense is that people will go after potential infringers. We need to ensure that what we do with the legislation has a balancing act.

I want to reiterate that it is important to have a framework in place to ensure that the VANOC Games succeed in the way they need to succeed and in the way they are able to generate the revenue necessary. The only way they can do that is to ensure there are certain trademark protections brought into law and that we are very serious about going after bootlegging. That needs to be understood.

The question here is how we balance the rights, not whether or not we support the legislation. The committee will need to do some work to ensure these rights are balanced off and that we are not using a massive hammer to hit the little ants, the very small operations that will, quite rightly, have the ability and the right to partake in the celebration of something as important as the Vancouver Games.

● (1650)

We had the example of the Olympia restaurant in Vancouver and the fact that it already had been for some time using this term. We have had a number of similar trademark law cases in recent years. The famous Barbie's Restaurant was sued by Mattel for an apparent trademark infringement when there had been an established use of Barbie's Restaurant for some time. I believe Barbie was the name of the owner of the restaurant.

Therefore, we have had cases and we have seen how they have played out in the courts. They definitely will help guide us as parliamentarians to ensure that the legislation we bring forth will be balanced to protect the notion of trademarks but also not excessive to unfairly infringe and shut down the fair use of terms like "tents", "winter", "Vancouver", "gold" , "sponsor" or "Whistler". Those are public terms used in a wide variety of applications.

Whether it is a small mom and pop operation that wants to celebrate the fact that a young woman or man from their community is going to Whistler to celebrate a golden event, and they want to invite people to partake, we certainly do not want to see this law misused in that sense.

I am not suggesting for a minute that is the intention of the VANOC committee. It has done an excellent job so far of promoting the games but with trademark law and copyright law we must be very clear that we are not simply moving the yardsticks one day, popping the tent up and saying that there will no longer be any implications from dramatically changing how we see trademark and copyright , particularly on the issue of reverse onus because it sets a precedent and we will start seeing it in other areas.

As I have said, we have already seen it in some of the suggestions on digital copyright and the attempt to bring in the reverse onus on the use of website materials. This is not related at all to the Olympics but it does concern the issue of creating a precedent. What we are looking at in Bill C-47 is the single largest change in trademark law in Canada in 50 years.

Every effort needs to be made at all levels of government to ensure that 2010 is as successful as it possibly can be. One of the lessons we have learned from the Olympic experience is that we need to ensure that at the end of the day the residents of the city of Vancouver and British Columbia are not left bearing the financial costs of staging such a massive event, which is why we work with private sponsorship. Private sponsorship is essential for the success of the Olympics, and so it should be.

However, we need to ensure the balancing act between providing businesses, which want to invest, security in that investment, but we must also ensure that the legislation we bring forth does not unfairly change the basic ground rules for average citizens who want to partake.

As I said earlier, we have been reassured that this strictly looks at commercial interests and commercial use of trademark logos, which is very reassuring to New Democrats because we believe that out of the 2010 games there will be all kinds of public comment. People will participate on their own blog cites. Some people will be against the Olympics, for whatever reason, and they will want to say things. We certainly do not want to have a law in place that shuts down the open and fair discussion and the fair use of phrases.

We are looking forward to seeing where we can go with this bill by working with other parties. I think this is one area where all parties believe that this will be an amazing event for the 21st century and for setting Vancouver on the road to being a world-class city.

We are all coming together at this time but it is very clear that we need to put aside our partisans hats and try to do the best we can so that after the games there are no sour feelings at any level in society that we, as parliamentarians, somehow dropped the ball. At the end of this, it must be fully understood that we brought forward bills that did everything possible to ensure the Paralympic and Olympic Games were the best ever.

● (1655)

Mrs. Betty Hinton (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Veterans Affairs, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I would like to assure my hon. colleague from the NDP that Vancouver is a world-class city. If he has not had the opportunity to visit, I would invite him to do so. As a very proud third generation British Columbian, Vancouver can hold its head high internationally. It is a beautiful city. I am certain that the games will be absolutely wonderful.

I share one of the concerns expressed by the hon. member and I would like to give him the assurance that I have had from the organizers of the Olympics. They will not go after small companies that have the name "Olympic" or something that relates to the Olympics in their name. They will be grandfathered. The organizers' concern is to maintain and hold onto the rings, which are symbolic internationally for the Olympics. They want to make certain that the symbol is used in the proper way.

Although many of the concerns I have heard him express today have been expressed to me earlier, I want to reassure him that the government took all those things into consideration. We will be supportive of small business but we must also protect the logo rights of the Olympics.

I again would invite the member to come to Vancouver. It is a fabulous city. It is known internationally as a hospitality centre and a wonderful place to visit. He should come to B.C. because we would love to have him there.

Mr. Charlie Angus: Mr. Speaker, although I am glad she took the time to invite me to her city, I have been there many times. I have played at the Vancouver folk festival so I am well aware of the city. However, I do believe there are many people in the world who have not been to Vancouver and I am hoping they will visit in 2010 so that it is fully recognized as a city of the world.

I am pleased that she is saying that they are very clear in terms of their interpretation of what they need to protect. She speaks of the Olympic rings. I have always been under the impression that the Olympic rings are already carefully protected under trademark and copyright because of the international symbolism that they have.

I would think that Bill C-47 is looking at other areas that have not been covered off, in particular, the VANOC games, which brings me back to my point about the Inukshuk and how that would be protected as it is a symbol that has been within the first nations communities for however long, we could not even begin to guess. I would be more concerned about that symbol suddenly being brought under trademark law than about somebody getting away with abusing the Olympic rings because that is already covered under international trademark law.

● (1700)

Mr. Sukh Dhaliwal (Newton—North Delta, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I know the member has some concerns but I can tell him that I was a Calgarian when we had the Olympics in 1988 and I was very proud to be an Albertan at the time. However, now I am a British Columbian and I am very proud to have British Columbia hosting the 2010 Olympic Games.

I had the opportunity to have some issues resolved by meeting with the CEO of the 2010 Olympics, Mr. Furlong, and the committee members. I wonder if the hon. member and his caucus have made any efforts to meet the CEO and the Olympic committee to get those questions answered.

Mr. Charlie Angus: Mr. Speaker, I am pleased the member had the privilege to be a Calgarian and now a Vancouverite, or within the jurisdiction of Vancouver.

I guess I am not really sure of the point of his question. Members of our caucus meet with key stakeholders on these issues all the time. However, being reassured in a meeting has very little to do with legislation. We are talking about bringing forward legislation here and legislation here is done publicly. It is done at committee and we do it clause by clause.

We have raised the questions because the law must be done very carefully and very clearly, which is something that is done at committee level. The CEO of the Olympics can speak at committee level, and we will hear that, but we can also hear from other groups that have concerns. We then resolve it. That is how we do legislation.

I would be more than willing to meet with anybody but I do not feel that will alleviate the fundamental issue, which is that legislation must be put to the test of a committee and of the witnesses and then it must be brought back to the House.

As I said, I am certain that in an instant like this we can all put our partisan hats aside because what we all want at the end of the day is legislation that will be the best to support the 2010 games.

Mrs. Irene Mathyssen (London—Fanshawe, NDP): Mr. Speaker, while my hon. colleague may lack sporting acuity, he is most definitely an advocate of the first class for artists and communicators in Canada.

I have wondered about this issue in regard to artists. The experience in other countries suggests that legislation can very often impair artists and their ability to do what they do best, and that is create art. Could he comment on that?

Is this the corporatization of the Olympic legacy? Could it indeed restrict artists? Does this preoccupation with trademarks further the ideals of the Olympic or Paralympic Games?

Mr. Charlie Angus: Mr. Speaker, the question from my colleague is an interesting one. The Olympics are symbols of something much larger than just sporting events among amateur athletes. They symbolize so much of our sense of an international coming together, and artists comment on that. The issue of trademarks is a concern.

I will give an example. I was talking with some documentary filmmakers about how many problems they had now making documentary films. So much of what we view is already under copyright or trademark without realizing it. They gave me an example that I found so shocking. They could not make a film near Niagara Falls because apparently the image of Niagara Falls, the light show, is under a trademark patent by a very large corporation, which I do not need to mention here. It is not all that relevant. Even a symbol such as Niagara Falls could not appear in a documentary film because it was under trademark.

When we talk about changing the rules on trademark and copyright and expanding that, we have to ensure that the balance is there between legitimate business rights and the ability of artists and community members to partake.

That has nothing to do with the five rings because they are like the golden arches. They are a specific symbol. There are other elements out there, certainly under the wide range of 70 terms that have been put under the tent of this trademark, which will cover off a much wider area than we have previously would have considered under an Olympic logo.

● (1705)

Mr. Sukh Dhaliwal (Newton—North Delta, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I welcome you back into the chair. I am a new member in the House, even though it is over a year, but there are always certain things that when I speak, I go off line, and I thank you for your input. You always give it to me after my speech, the things that I should have done differently. Therefore, I commend you for not only helping the people from Ottawa—Orléans, but for helping new members like myself as well.

I am very pleased and happy to be standing here today as a proud British Columbian and to speak to this bill. I feel the Olympic Games in British Columbia are more than just a sporting and cultural event. It is tremendously important to the economic future of the greater Vancouver area, which includes my riding of Newton—North Delta.

Recently the Vancouver 2010 committee introduced its business plan. I am very proud to say, as should all British Columbians and Canadians, that this presents a balanced budget and a solid contingency plan for cost overruns. It is an amazing achievement when we consider that we are talking about almost $2 billion in expenditures.

I do not think I need to tell anyone in the House that $2 billion spent on a project of this kind requires a great deal of fiscal management. For those on the Olympic committee, this means they have to be as careful as possible about the Olympic and Paralympics brands. It is simply a global reality. There is no better branding than the Olympic brand.

People from Montreal can witness their legacy from 1976. I went to Calgary in 1988. I have seen how important the branding is. People in 1976 and 1988 showed to the world that they were ready. Vancouver and an area like mine, Newton—North Delta, and the greater Vancouver area are more than ready to showcase all we have to offer to the world.

The *Economist* magazine now rates us as the number one place to live by all measures of quality of life. It is a legacy of the Liberal government. I say legacy of the Liberal government because I came to this country in 1984. I saw where the Conservative Prime Minister Brian Mulroney took this country and what he did to the country. We took it back in 1993 and put it on a sound financial footing.

When it comes to the Olympics, the Liberals were there on day one, we are there today and we will be there until the last minute.

However, in a global marketplace, with more players than ever, more people are looking to make a profit in every way they can. Solid brand identity is crucial. It is a competitive advantage we must take very seriously and protect at all costs.

That is why I support, in principle, all aspects of the bill. The Olympic effort has been years in the making. The Liberal government of the Right Hon. Jean Chrétien was there at the very beginning and we championed the bid from its earliest stages.

Prime Minister Chrétien was out there speaking up for Vancouver and British Columbia, doing all he could do to make this happen. This is not a commitment that we would ever turn our backs on. As the CEO of the 2010 Olympics, John Furlong, recently mentioned, an effort like this requires real leadership at the federal level.

● (1710)

As I said earlier, our federal government should be up front, taking the lead on branding. The pins I am wearing today every MP will be wearing one day and very proudly.

I want to repeat that brand protection is revenue protection. There are high risks involved when we are looking at securing over $700 million in corporate sponsors and funding. That is all the money coming from private corporate sponsors.

I believe federal leadership should have happened faster in getting this bill to the draft stage. Last week my caucus met with members of the Olympic committee. There was a sense of urgency in getting this done. In finally providing real brand protection, an international showcase for Canada like this should not have to do all the groundwork.

In caucus we made it quite clear to the committee that we were there in the beginning for it we are there to give them all the support we can today. We will not turn our backs on it at any time, the way the government turned its back on Kyoto, Kelowna, child care and income trusts. It is a never-ending list of betrayals. In fact, we have made overtures to the government time and time again to move the Olympic agenda forward, as fast and as forcefully as possible.

The response has been, to say the least, disappointing. The government has been in no great hurry to cooperate. Perhaps it has other priorities for Vancouver and British Columbians, priorities that include shortchanging Pacific gateway funding and moving forward on infrastructure development in my area to jeopardize the quality of life, the property values and most important, the environment like Burns Bog in my riding.

Even the Conservatives' own member of Parliament, who I am proud and happy to have as my constituent, does not support that. Priorities that include delivering two budgets have been bad for British Columbia. They have dismantled the support for child care. They have dragged their feet on funding for more police officers, so much so that the mayor of Vancouver has spent more money on new officers to date than the government across the country.

As I said, even faced with this irresponsible mismanagement of British Columbia priorities, we have tried to work with the government to get a bill like this done fast. The Olympic and Paralympic games are too important to waste time on partisan bickering.

As a person with a small business, one of the first lessons one learns is that time is money. Maybe this is a lesson lost on the Prime Minister, who has never had to worry about a bottom line in the same way. The point of the matter is that when we are talking about protecting a brand, the longer we wait, the worse it gets in an international market.

There are some minor points in the bill, as the hon. member from the NDP mentioned, that should still be worked out, points that will require some discussion and debate in the committee. We want to ensure that we are not too heavy-handed, that our decisions will not affect the local small businesses, which are the lifeblood of Vancouver's communities. They are the lifeblood of my community of Newton North Delta. This fine tuning can be done if there is a real will to move this forward.

● (1715)

We have to make sure in our clause by clause approach to everything in this bill that we are as thorough, thoughtful and careful in our consideration of the business opportunities an event like this presents.

Mr. Furlong and the great people on his committee have already proven themselves to be careful and well planned. Vancouver knows, from its experience with Expo 86, that there are many who have said this is going to cost the taxpayers more than they get out of it. However, an event like this will easily prove them wrong with real leadership and protection of the marketing opportunities we have in British Columbia.

Money from brand protection will make it easier for us to make sure that the effort will not have to cut corners and look for profits without careful consideration. Brand protection is like an insurance policy. It means we can really learn from past Olympic success stories that include Montreal in 1976 and Calgary in 1988. We can develop the right model for the taxpayers and the citizens of Vancouver and British Columbia.

We do not have to worry about the mistakes made on housing. I do not think I need to remind this House about what happened in Expo 86, when the new housing that was created raised real estate prices downtown and caused the lower income families to have to move out of the downtown core.

Branding protection is revenue protection. It makes it easier for us to be innovative and proactive. Perhaps we can ensure that the new housing for athletes will actually benefit low income families in the Vancouver area.

The federal government could have that dialogue if of course it displayed the leadership. I am sure there would be the will and the way from the provincial and municipal orders of government if they heard more from this government, if real direction was there from the top.

When we look at the actual percentage of government money committed to this effort, I believe it is a little over 25% and the whole of the money is going into infrastructure projects.

I am not advocating irresponsible spending because we are talking about tax revenues here. I am talking about real leadership for the real investment we are putting in place. I am talking about protecting that investment in the most proactive ways we can.

From my perspective I see no reason why we would want to delay the process in committee. The way the government has blocked and delayed the passage of its own justice bills for partisan gains, and the way it has filibustered in committee on questions of access to information, the Vancouver Olympics and Paralympic Games are simply too important to be sacrificed to such small-minded, partisan interests.

The way I see it, the government has a clear choice: it can finally stand up for British Columbia, and champion and support the tremendous efforts of the Vancouver Olympic Committee to get this bill passed. It can protect the Olympic and Paralympic brands for Vancouver and the revenues that will benefit all hard-working British Columbian families.

The fact is when we have expenditures of $1.6 billion and, as I mentioned, when over $700 million of that must be raised from corporate interests, we cannot jeopardize, in any way, the trust and the commitment that private sponsors will put in this Olympic effort.

● (1720)

This bill is in the greater public interest because of this. The people of Newton—North Delta, the people of Vancouver, and British Columbians and Canadians from coast to coast will watch us showcase what we have to offer to the world. This is why Liberals like myself and Liberals in the British Columbia caucus here in the House have supported this effort from the very beginning.

It is why we are proud to stand as partners and supporters, and why we want to see this bill get through the committee process as soon as possible. We want to ensure that the young people in British Columbia can see how proud we are as members of Parliament by providing Canadians with opportunities for a better future.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Paule Brunelle (Trois-Rivières, BQ): Mr. Speaker, after listening to my colleague's speech, I understand that the Liberals will be in favour of Bill C-47, because they have a good understanding of how important it is to provide adequate funding for these Olympic Games, even more so because my colleague is a member from Vancouver.

We can see how quickly the government wants to adopt Bill C-47. But it seems to me that the government is much slower to react to the phenomena of counterfeiting and intellectual property crime, which have increased considerably in Canada.

What does my colleague think about the Conservative government's slow reaction when it comes to intellectual property, whether in connection with films, the manufacturing sector or whatever?

[*English*]

Mr. Sukh Dhaliwal: Mr. Speaker, I am a proud British Columbian and proud to be part of the 2010 Olympics as the hon. member was a proud Quebecker in 1976 when Montreal hosted the Olympics that year.

When it comes to the government working on anything, the Conservatives delay each and every thing. They inspect bills, whether they are their own justice bills, whether it is the counterfeiting legislation, child care, or access to information. I was on that committee when the Conservative member filibustered for four consecutive meetings.

The government must learn to act on things faster and in a more efficient manner, so it can serve Canadians and Quebeckers.

Mr. Mario Silva (Davenport, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I want to take this opportunity to congratulate my hon. colleague for his excellent speech and the work he has done on this file. Obviously, it shows a great interest and enthusiasm on his part for the Olympics coming in 2010 to Vancouver.

Vancouver has a very soft spot in my heart because I went to grade school there for a number of years before moving to Toronto. Certainly, we are very pleased with Vancouver's bid. We are looking forward to the Olympics. When I was on city council in Toronto, I worked on the 2008 Olympics bid. Unfortunately, we did not win, it went to China, but we are very proud and very pleased that Vancouver was chosen to host the world and bring the world together. We are very delighted and look forward to that very day.

Branding is a very important issue and I understand the issue that my hon. colleague raised in his remarks in relation to Bill C-47. However, there are those who have issued concerns that this might be some form of censorship. I would like my hon. colleague to comment on that and elaborate further why this legislation is needed.

● (1725)

Mr. Sukh Dhaliwal: Mr. Speaker, the member for Davenport shows commitment. I went the other way around. I was in Alberta to begin with and moved to British Columbia. I would love to have him back there. He would be welcome.

I also congratulate him as a city councillor for his efforts and the work that he has done on the 2008 Olympics bid. This is the type of work that has to be done for causes like this from day one. I can say that the right hon. Jean Chrétien and members of the Liberal Party were there from day one and are there today.

The member asked me about protection and its effect. As I said earlier, brand protection is revenue protection and $700 million, which is almost 100% of the money that is going to be spent on the Olympics, is coming from private corporate big sponsors and we cannot turn our backs on them.

If we do not raise that kind of money, it is going to be a burden on Canadians. Someone has to pay. The British Columbia government has made a commitment to the Olympics committee that it will contribute to any shortfall. When I stand here as a responsible member of Parliament for British Columbians, I have to take that into consideration. That is why I am a big supporter of brand protection, which is revenue protection.

At the same time, because it has a grandfathering clause, it is not going to affect small businesses that use the word “Olympics” or “olympia pizza”, for example, in the riding of Vancouver East. Those people will be protected in the grandfathering clause, but at the same time the Internet and the media, which was a question asked earlier, will not be part of this protection. They will be free to express their opinions. They are free to use the logo and the name in whichever sense they want. I hope I answered that question.

Hon. Keith Martin (Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, when the era of the modern Olympics began with Baron Pierre de Coubertin in 1896 and he coined the term "citius, altius, fortius", he could not have imagined how far the Olympics have come today. What a grand spectacle it is and what an advantage it is to communities that host them.

I want to thank my colleague from Newton—North Delta for all of his hard work and all of our colleagues in Vancouver who have worked hard to make this happen with our provincial counterparts and the private sector.

I want to ask my colleague this. Does he not think that a small part of the moneys generated from the Olympics could be used to reinvest in athletic facilities in British Columbia and other parts of Canada, and particularly to work with children to make sure they have the facilities that will enable them to participate in sports?

Mr. Sukh Dhaliwal: Mr. Speaker, I would like to congratulate my hon. colleague from Esquimalt—Juan de Fuca for all his work because he was there even before I was on this Olympics file. He has done good work.

When it comes to children, I see where the member is coming from. He has a commitment to youth and our future generations. The money that we are raising and the infrastructure that we are putting together will be used by other generations to come.

● (1730)

[*Translation*]

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): It being 5:30 p.m., the House will now proceed to the consideration of private members' business as listed on today's order paper.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

[*English*]

INCOME TRUSTS

Mr. John Cannis (Scarborough Centre, Lib.) moved:

That, in the opinion of the House, in relation to the proposed tax on distributions from publicly traded income trusts or publicly traded partnerships, other than those that only hold passive real estate investments, the government should repeal its planned 31.5 per cent tax regime and replace it with an immediate 10 per cent tax to be paid by such entities with the revenue to be shared equitably with provincial governments provided that the tax would be refundable to investors who are Canadian residents in order to: (a) minimize the loss of savings to Canadians who invested in income trusts; (b) preserve the strengths of the income trust sector; (c) create tax fairness by eliminating any tax leakage caused by the income trust sector; and (d) create neutrality by eliminating any incentive to convert from a corporation to an income trust purely for tax purposes.

He said: Mr. Speaker, as each one of us in this hon. chamber stands to debate this motion, I hope that we do not try to distort what the motion is really saying.

As the leader of the Liberal Party, the member for Saint-Laurent—Cartierville, indicated in his presentation last week, there are two segments to this initiative on behalf of the Liberal Party. When the idiotic and not thought out initiative was suggested by the Minister of Finance, the member for Markham—Unionville immediately commented. As has been said by many people who are not

politicians, the member for Markham—Unionville is a recognized economist, a person who in his private life worked in the financial sector, and he could best understand this issue.

All of us have made every effort to understand it. As it is unravelling, not only we as parliamentarians recognize the faults in the finance minister's initiative and the new Conservative government, but average Canadians from coast to coast to coast have picked up on it. I thank the media, because the media have done an admirable job in bringing the facts forward.

People within the industry, representatives of various organizations that I will refer to in a moment, not just within Canada but outside Canada as well, are saying that we are often described as a member of the global community. We are international partners in our responsibility to create a safe society for people to live in both here and abroad. One example is the important mission in Afghanistan which our men and women in the Canadian Forces are undertaking. We have to ensure that the finances of nations are stabilized in order to create the level playing field that we have been encouraging.

Just last week when the Minister of Finance was asked a question he replied that the government wants to create fairness and a level playing field. On the interest deductibility issue, it seemed really odd to us how he was going to create a level playing field when other countries had the same provision for their corporate sectors, and yet it was being taken away from Canadians thus creating an unbalanced playing field for us to work on.

It is not just in this Parliament that this issue has come before us. There was a discussion and an inquiry on this issue in the last Parliament when there was also a minority government. There was talk about looking at what we could do, whether we should change it or leave it alone, et cetera. The member for Scarborough—Guildwood, who formerly was the parliamentary secretary to the minister of finance, provided his input. I also applaud the member for Halton who has been on top of this issue right from day one. He has been very forthcoming with respect to his comments and his information gathering.

I will talk about the last Parliament for a moment. In all fairness, Canadians who are watching us today should be reminded of what happened so they can appreciate what is happening here today.

● (1735)

When this initiative was undertaken in the last Parliament, the Liberal government of the day was looking at it, there is no question. Inevitably it was decided that we would not do anything with the income trust file. That was publicly known. Canadians were concerned at that time, and I do not blame them. They said, "They said they were going to do it and now they are saying they are not going to do it". Canadians felt a bit uncomfortable and rightfully so.

The leader of the opposition at that time, the right hon. Prime Minister today, made a commitment that should the Conservatives be successful in securing government, they would not do anything. They would leave it as it is. In the Prime Minister's own words which I quoted last week, he said, "We guarantee you we will not touch this file", to the seniors especially, whom I talked about last week, and to corporate Canada, which I do not like to refer to as such because it is not what I believe it is; I would refer to it as working Canada, to employed Canada, because it affects people's jobs as well. Based on that commitment during the campaign, Canadians felt comfortable that they had a firm commitment. That is campaigning.

We fast forward a little and the Conservatives assume the role of the new Conservative minority government and lo and behold, to our surprise the Minister of Finance, the former minister of finance for Ontario, and we all know the devastation of Ontario under the finance minister, came up with this bright idea out of the blue. The important thing for me, on behalf of my constituents and the seniors with whom I have been speaking, that the Conservatives in essence reneged on a firm campaign commitment.

I am pleased today, after the initiatives of the Liberal Party, that the interest deductibility issue has been addressed, bringing us back again to a level playing field. Finally the finance minister, the Prime Minister, the new Conservative Party as a whole saw the light that it was indeed wrong, that it would hurt Canadian companies and that it would not permit them to compete fairly as other countries and their organizations would have been able to do. I am pleased that they saw the light. It just goes to show that the will of the people and their message does get through in this Parliament.

I would like to quote some distinguished people on how they felt about the government's initiatives on income trusts. Allan Lanthier, a retired senior partner of Ernst and Young and the immediate past chairman of the Canadian Tax Foundation said it is "the single most misguided proposal I have out of Ottawa in 35 years".

We have stood in the House many times applauding and congratulating various organizations, our firefighters, our military, our police and the teaching profession as well. Today, as young as we get, we always remember our teachers. I recently had the opportunity to celebrate the 100th anniversary of the high school I attended, Riverdale Collegiate Institute in Toronto. The first thing I did was to thank all those teachers for the years they taught us well.

Claude Lamoureux of the Ontario Teachers' Pension Plan board, said the following:

> This is unbelievable. I do not know who in finance looked at this. I cannot believe any sensible person would do this.

● (1740)

Another individual who always comments post-budget is Mr. Thomas d'Aquino, president and chief executive of the Canadian Council of Chief Executives. Somebody like him is getting input from corporate Canada, or business Canada, whatever one calls it. This is what he had to say:

> —we are worried that the change announced in the budget may seriously undermine the competitiveness of Canada's homegrown champions—the companies that are most active and most successful in building global businesses from head offices in Canadian communities. It may also damage Canada's standing as an international centre for financial services.

We can imagine the kind of effects that this policy would have had not just on Canada's competitiveness but right down to the families, to the households, to people's inability to educate their children, to pay their mortgages, to seniors.

● (1745)

Mr. Dean Del Mastro: Shameful.

Mr. John Cannis: Mr. Speaker, the member is right. It is shameful. Even members of the Conservative Party are saying it is shameful. It just goes to show that they finally saw the light.

Nancy Hughes Anthony, the president of the Canadian Chamber of Commerce, whom that party supports and we support as well, had this to say:

> The proposal appears to be driven by revenue enhancement rather than a desire to build a competitive advantage.

Let me explain that. When she says revenue enhancement, the Conservatives promised they were going to give a one per cent reduction in the GST. They knew right away almost $6 billion would be eliminated from the revenue.

I have said before and I will say again there is a price for civility and it is called tax. A friend of mine said, "I do not want to pay taxes anymore. I am tired of it". I said, "Great, do not pay taxes, but do not ask for the services that the nation provides. Do not ask for military support. Do not ask for security. Do not ask for moneys toward health. Do not ask for money for infrastructure".

Last week the member for Peterborough, he too finally saw the light. He read from page 23 of our red book and finally he completed the sentence about our promise to eliminate the GST. He was right, but what those members failed to say was that in the last 13 years we had promised to eliminate the GST and replace it with an equally revenue generating tax. The member was not there at that time. I was, when we offered to the provinces to harmonize it. The Maritimes did. If Mr. Harris and Mr. Klein at that time had wished, it would have been a done deal.

There is so much to say on this file and it just goes on and on.

I was just asked how to build Canada's economy. Let me answer the member from the Conservative Party. When we inherited the mess they left, the Conservatives' blunders, a $43 billion deficit and a debt that was going out of whack, our country was being described as a third world, bankrupt banana republic. We did not complain. We just went to work. We did not raise taxes. We lowered taxes. We created the longest uninterrupted period of growth in the history of our country. More employment was created under the Liberal government than at any other time in the history of our country.

The Conservative Party has finally heard that 91% of the people do not wish to see these types of policies implemented. I would just remind those members that two out of three Canadians did not vote for that party.

I am glad they are changing their minds. I am glad they did on the interest deductibility and hopefully, they will see that our proposal is the right way to go.

Mr. Dean Del Mastro (Peterborough, CPC): Mr. Speaker, once again we see debate in this House brought down to levels to which it should never go. The member quite frankly brought up so many points that were false, I do not know where to begin, but let me begin by making a few points of fact on the motion that the member brought to the House.

First of all, the member is probably aware that every single provincial finance treasurer came forward and said there was tax leakage, that it was substantial, that we could not afford to have it and we could not afford to let it keep on going. The governor of the Bank of Canada came forward and said there was tax leakage, and what is more, that corporations switching to income trusts was a bad structure.

I see the member for Mississauga South is counselling the member. That is good. The member for Mississauga South also knows nothing about this topic, but I will tell members something else.

Finn Poschmann from the C.D. Howe Institute said something had to be done, and better now than later. Kevin Dancey from the Canadian Institute of Chartered Accountants said that there was leakage and there was also severe reporting problems with income trusts.

That member stands in this House and says he stands for families. He should stand for them now. He should stand for tax fairness while he has a chance. The member for Markham—Unionville has no idea. His friends on Bay Street are the ones who influence him. The thugs with CAITI are the ones who influence him.

Regular Canadians, people who pay taxes and rely on the people in this House to do their jobs and stand up for them, are the ones who need tax fairness. The member should stand up for them. I would like to know why he does not.

Mr. John Cannis: Mr. Speaker, as for all the huffing and puffing that was going on over there, if the member had read the motion he would have seen how we are asking this initiative to indeed become revenue neutral so that nobody is penalized. Those members are just used to taxing. For example, we are just saying to move it from the 31.5% that they are proposing to 10%. Who is being fair here?

Second, I want to remind the member that we are trying to protect the country first of all. He will have to answer to the seniors in his riding.

I also want to point out for the hon. member that 15 income trusts were taken over just recently, costing a tax base for our country of $6 billion.

Let me close with this. The *Gartner Letter*, a United Kingdom daily commentary on the markets, described it this way: the Canadian finance minister's "idiotic 'trust' taxation decision rendered last October 31st, which we still believe ranks as one of the worst decisions ever rendered by a person in a position of monetary authority".

That says it all.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Paul Crête (Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup, BQ): Mr. Speaker, I will speak quickly, since we do not have much time. Does the hon. member admit that, on the essence of the issue, that was the right decision to make? Unfortunately, the Conservatives changed their mind after they had promised they would not modify the rules. Many small investors were swindled by that decision. However, on the essence of the issue, the situation could no longer continue.

[*English*]

Mr. John Cannis: Mr. Speaker, I thank the hon. member because he is adding a human element to this. I very much appreciate that.

When the potential leader of a nation, as he becomes the leader of the nation, sends a signal, people take certain steps. They may invest savings and they may invest for their future, et cetera. Today, a year and a half later, these people have been misled. Their lives have been affected negatively. That is what this is all about.

I am simply telling them to let us add a human element to this. They have betrayed seniors and it has to stop.

● (1750)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): The hon. member for Simcoe North for a very short question.

Mr. Bruce Stanton (Simcoe North, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as I listened to this hon. member I wondered what he would have to say about prominent members from his own party like, for example, Sheila Copps, who said that reversing the income trust decision "would...run afoul of espoused Liberal principles, by promoting a tax loophole for a select few financed by the rest of us".

What does he have to say about these prominent Liberals like Ms. Copps?

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): Equal time for the hon. member for Scarborough Centre, but no more.

Mr. John Cannis: Thank you kindly, Mr. Speaker. Every member, after they have moved on and are outside this House, has every right to say something. The members who may have more information on this are the committee members, who participate on a daily basis, or experts such as the people I have just outlined, including the former finance minister, the president of the teachers' pension fund, the president of the Canadian Council of Chief Executives, the president of the Canadian Council of the—

An hon. member: Oh, oh!

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): Resuming debate.

The hon. member for St. Catharines.

Mr. Rick Dykstra (St. Catharines, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I appreciate the opportunity to speak to the bill.

I am a little surprised to see the member here. He and I had a good debate on Thursday of last week and he indicated that if I showed him where in the Liberal red book it said that the GST was going to be cancelled, scrapped and changed, he would resign, but he is here today to speak to his private member's motion. I took him up on his challenge, mano-a-mano, and, like the Liberal Party, he did not keep his commitment.

I take this opportunity to contribute to the debate on Motion No. 321, a proposal that represents another sorry chapter in the tale of Liberal mismanagement on the issue of income trusts. It is a book that is never going to become a best seller, and I would like to think, as probably all Canadians would, that the conclusion of the Liberal Party is actually being written as we speak.

The Liberal Party now has had at least three policies on income trusts: one with the tax, one without a tax, and now we are back with a tax in another Liberal plan.

The proposal in this motion fails in every respect. First, there is no tax neutrality between trusts and corporations. Second, it does not address significant federal and provincial revenue losses if existing trusts continue to grow. Third, there is no level playing field. It maintains a tax advantage for income trusts over corporations, which we have seen is bad for this country.

It would open the door for corporate taxpayers like Hibernia and EnCana to convert to trusts. No wonder, as the member for Peterborough so aptly put it, that Finn Poschmann of the C.D. Howe Institute called it "a politically funky stew". I have seen Finn at our finance committee meetings and I am not saying that he always agrees with us, but I will say that he and the government are 100% on side in terms of what we needed to do with income trusts.

Our government is committed to tax fairness, as we announced on October 31, 2006. Prior to that, Canadian companies were announcing intentions to convert to the income trusts and it was happening at a frenetic pace. Such decisions offered short term tax benefits but created significant economic distortions. It threatened Canada's long term economic growth and it shifted future tax burdens onto taxpaying Canadians, both families and individuals.

It would have meant unchecked growth that would have resulted in billions in lost revenue, which would not have been invested in the priorities of Canadians. This has been confirmed by a number of experts. Economist Andrew Teasdale noted that "exploitation was set to expand to a level which could have significantly impacted the ability of the government's right to make tax policy".

Bank of Canada Governor David Dodge said:

> By giving incentives that led to the inappropriate use of the income trust form of organization, the tax system was actually creating inefficiencies in capital markets, inefficiencies that, over time, would lead to lower levels of investment, output and productivity.

The introduction of the tax fairness plan restores balance and fairness to the federal tax system.

The decision was not an easy one. It was a tough one, but it was the right one. The provision of doing the right thing and addressing tax relief means that we could reduce the general corporate income tax rate; we could increase the age credit amount for seniors; and in regard to a recommendation, after 40 years we actually could introduce pension income splitting for seniors.

This is the right plan. It will not indefinitely maintain a tax imbalance between income trusts and corporations, and it will not maintain the economic distortions which that imbalance entailed, an imbalance that over the next number of years would have forced personal income tax rate increases that would have shocked Canadians.

Dominic D'Alessandro of Manulife Financial said it was "the right thing" and that "continuing on this path [of income trusts] would not be in the long-term interest of this country".

● (1755)

In April 2007 the *Financial Post* had a poll that showed that a majority of Canada's business leaders supported our action and saw income trusts "as an increasing threat to economic growth because income trusts, unlike normal companies, were obliged to distribute their earnings and couldn't readily reinvest".

They couldn't talk about the reinvestment of capital equipment, of machinery. That is something we put right in the budget with the accelerated capital cost allowance that allows companies and corporations across this country to accelerate the investment they make into their companies. Instead of doing it over 10 or 15 years, they can now do it in two years. We are starting to see companies and corporations move in that direction.

Even the Liberal member for Halton said that "reforming the [income] trust business and stemming the tide of conversions is necessary for the long-term health of the economy".

Motion No. 321 offers dangerous false hope to Canadians who suffered losses, regrettably, and it suggests that going back to an imbalance is actually the right thing to do. It would reintroduce unnecessary uncertainty into financial markets. We have seen, as I outlined, that the movement of the Liberal Party on income trusts has shown that the financial markets were imbalanced when they tried to and did not move on this.

I am not the only one saying that. Jack Mintz of the Rotman School of Management said that the Liberals are "creating market uncertainty by extending false hope to investors". The *National Post* said, "The issue is settled". It said, "In other words, it's time to move on".

Everyone in the House got the message except the Liberals. Why not? Why are the Liberals proposing a plan that will exacerbate revenue loss? Let us imagine the revenue loss if Hibernia or EnCana and other large energy companies were to convert to income trusts. The Liberal plan would create a burden on Canadian taxpayers and would cost the federal and provincial treasuries billions.

Every single province supported our tax fairness plan. From across this country finance ministers from every province and territory wrote letters to every member of the finance committee to tell them that this was the right thing to do.

P.E.I. finance minister Mitch Murphy said that without our plan the province could find itself "facing a severe tax base decline...[that] would be very damaging to [Prince Edward Island's] efforts to build a strong, self reliant corporate tax base...as well as in the Atlantic region in general".

Canada's Conservative government has said it repeatedly: Canadians pay far too much tax.

Budgets 2006 and 2007 introduced a total of over $40 billion of tax relief benefiting Canadian individuals and businesses.

Ignoring the issue of income trusts would have resulted in ordinary Canadians paying more tax today and for years to come.

Corporate tax avoidance left us with us with a choice. We either balance our budget on the backs of ordinary Canadians or we take firm action to implement tax fairness. It was not an easy decision. When leadership is required and when tough decisions are made, leadership is never easy and those decisions are never easy, but those decisions have to be made.

The tax fairness plan provides certainty and security. Proceeding with the plan means acting in the national interest and enhancing incentives to save and invest for family retirement and security.

Unlike previous governments, we did not base our decisions on political calculation but on principles of tax fairness, balancing the needs of the individual investors versus the interests of taxpayers.

Decisions are all about fairness: fairness for Canadian taxpayers and their families who would otherwise be asked to pay more and more; fairness for the corporate sector, by removing the tax distortion in favour of income trusts relative to corporations; and fairness for all Canadian governments, federal, provincial and territorial, by preventing a significant loss of tax revenue, by setting right a significant wrong.

Where once there was speculation, today there is certainty. Where once there was posturing, today there are principled decisions. Where once there was dithering, today we have decisiveness. Where once we had confusion, today we have confidence.

Businesses are making their own choices and they are moving on. It is time we all moved on. The result of our decision is clear: a tax system that is fairer for Canadians and that will help our economy to become more productive, efficient and dynamic today and for years to come.

● (1800)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Paul Crête (Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivière-du-Loup, BQ): Mr. Speaker, our debate on this motion must take two different angles into account. This is an example of a terrible decision made by the federal government, which, systematically, year after year, sends conflicting messages to the business community and investors.

For example, in September 2005, the Liberal finance minister declared a moratorium on the creation of income trusts, under the pretext that the government wanted to limit the loss of tax revenues stemming from the conversion of corporations. In his economic and fiscal update in November 2005, the minister flip-flopped and lifted the moratorium that he had just declared in September 2005.

When the Conservatives said during the election campaign that they would not touch the financial vehicles known as income trusts, many investors found them to be a worthwhile investment. Big businesses and small investors all went ahead with them. The Conservatives must accept their considerable responsibility. Their actions caused the stock market activity that we saw in relation to income trusts.

But this tax avoidance had to be eliminated. When he was running for office, the current Minister of Finance should have been careful and said that he would look at the figures and announce appropriate measures once he was in power. Instead, he said that he would not make any change, but he reversed his position in the fall of 2006. Using a ways and means motion, he announced the introduction of a tax on the income distributed by trusts to companies, thereby going back on what he had said during the election campaign. This caused serious problems. However, if we take a close look at this issue, we see that the Conservative government practically had no choice. The finance department estimated that year in and year out, the different levels of government lost $400 million in revenue because of income trusts.

For example, Bell and Telus announced that they would convert to income trusts which, in and of itself, would have inflated tax losses to about $1 billion annually. This measure, which was allowing corporations to avoid paying significant amounts of tax, had to be eliminated.

The measure offered tax benefits, but no constructive benefit to the economy. The income trust structure practically forces a company to pay 100% of its profits to its shareholders at the end of the year, which is highly counter-productive in terms of economic investments. If the company keeps part of its profits for an investment project, for instance, it must pay the maximum amount of taxes on that non-distributed revenue. This structure did not promote investment. This is why, in addition to the tax leakage associated with the conversion of a growing number of income trusts for reasons that are strictly tax motivated, the potential loss of productivity in our businesses is a real danger when the manufacturing sector in Quebec and Canada is going through a serious productivity crisis.

For example, according to the *World Competitiveness Yearbook, 2007*, Canada was ranked seventh in 2005, but fell to 18th in 2006. Had the government not stepped in, a company such as Bell, for example, would have been forced to distribute all profits to its shareholders or be subject to substantial financial penalties. It makes no sense for this structure to be applied to a company such as Bell. Thus, Bell would have been forced to cancel its investments in order to ensure its growth and would have been condemned to die a slow death. Entire industrial sectors could have been forced, by shareholders wishing to maximize their short-term profits, to convert to income trusts merely for tax reasons. At the same time, they would have had to sacrifice long-term growth in our industrial sector. Action had to be taken to correct this situation. That is what the government did.

It was the way in which they did it that had a significant negative impact on the stock exchange and on the portfolios of small and large investors. First, it backtracked on its election promise made to citizens and investors that it would not change the tax treatment. After it came into power, it suddenly changed its mind.

The Bloc would have liked the Minister of Finance to have taken more care in making his decision. He could have arrived at a conclusion that would have avoided using this solution. The Bloc Québécois did make constructive suggestions in this regard.

● (1805)

Nevertheless, in the end, we have to come to terms with the government's position as expressed in the budget and the bill to implement the budget, which is currently before the Standing Committee on Finance. The Bloc Québécois does not believe that this budget corrects the fiscal imbalance. It merely corrects the financial imbalance without dealing with the underlying fiscal imbalance. All the same, we think that the budget deserves our support, and the people of Quebec agree with us on that. As part of its budget, the government will be transferring adequate funds to Quebec. In light of our current financial situation and the fact that often, the needs are provincial while the money is federal, that will give the province a chance to breathe.

They are correcting the situation for this year and the next few years, but they are not making any structural improvements. The federal government has yet to take that step. The Bloc Québécois has been fighting this battle for the past four years in the House of Commons and in every other forum imaginable. It has based its arguments on the Séguin report and the consensus in Quebec. Four years ago, nobody in this House was talking about fiscal imbalance. Now we have at least one budget that will allocate major funds to Quebec. As such, the budget deserves our support.

The income trust situation should have been fixed with a similar measure despite the fact that it clearly had a negative impact on a lot of investors. In terms of the underlying issue, the decision the government made was necessary, yet the government should have found other ways to ensure that the measure had as few negative effects as possible. Proposals to address this were submitted to the committee. The Bloc Québécois has been recognized for its efforts in that regard. The government did not agree to the Bloc's proposals. Instead, it implemented its own crude solution, which is fine, but our solution would have been better.

If the government had kept its original position and not made any changes, we would be faced today with huge flights of capital, which would add significantly to the challenges and problems facing the manufacturing industry in Quebec and Canada. We know how important it is in today's competitive global economy for capital to be available and used to improve productivity and not just make tax gains.

I believe that, on the face of it, the proposal my colleague is making today is not acceptable. This House must reject this motion. Moreover, if it were adopted, it would run counter to the budget that has been adopted and the implementation bill that is currently under study.

I invite my colleague and anyone who has questions about this issue that should be studied to continue making representations during the pre-budget consultations to come. This will not resolve the issue for this year, but if any additional information and solutions are out there, it would be interesting to know what they are. The Bloc Québécois began looking at income trusts in 2005, after the Liberal finance minister announced that the moratorium had been lifted. We did not want to abolish income trusts at that time. Instead of preventing corporations from becoming income trusts, we were in favour of introducing a minimum tax on profits from income trusts. We felt that this was worth considering, as it would rebalance the tax treatment of income trusts and corporations.

Following the minister's decision, in October 2006, the member for Joliette, who was then our party's finance critic, brought forward a motion before the Standing Committee on Finance that read as follows:

> That, as soon as the report on prebudget consultations has been completed, the Standing Committee on Finance study the economic and fiscal consequences of the transformation of a growing number of taxable corporations into income trusts.

A few days later, we learned where the finance minister stood on this issue. Today, we have to choose between voting for this motion —which would recreate a very difficult situation that is not good for the economy and especially the manufacturing industry—and rejecting this motion. The Bloc Québécois chooses to reject the motion. We believe that that is better overall for Quebec's economy. We must move in that direction.

● (1810)

[*English*]

Mr. Pat Martin (Winnipeg Centre, NDP): Mr. Speaker, there is a good reason why the United States, Great Britain, Japan, Australia, or any country in the European Union, such as Germany or France, do not allow income trusts. The United States does not allow them because they are disastrous economic policy, and I do not use the word "disastrous" lightly.

Income trusts are corporate greed gone wild. They are a corporate wet dream. No business likes to pay taxes, so these guys have discovered a way to pay none, not just lower taxes but no taxes. The guy who developed this got a promotion. Some young Turk somewhere on Bay Street or Wall Street got a bonus that year after inventing this. I cannot get over how we have allowed this disastrous policy to percolate and incubate until it has reached the magnitude that it has.

The NDP spoke out as soon as it noticed it. I took note when the Yellow Pages converted to an income trust. It was a good number of years ago. I met one of the lawyers who orchestrated the Yellow Pages conversion. He said to me, "You are a socialist". He asked why we were not screaming bloody murder, that somebody should call the cops, that there was robbery going on. That was essentially his point of view. He asked how we could stay silent on it, did we not read the financial pages? In actual fact, sometimes I think we do not read the financial pages enough because stuff like goes on that deserves to be denounced in the strongest possible way.

Businesses do not like paying taxes, so they argue with government all the time that they should pay less and less. We balk sometimes at that, but they have managed to shift the tax burden successfully over the years. It used to be that roughly 50% of government's tax revenue came from individuals and the other 50% came from business. That has shifted dramatically to 80:20, to 85:15, to where individuals are assuming the overwhelming majority. With income trusts, businesses found a way to pay no taxes and shift all the burden on to the unit holder who would get the revenue.

A lot of people do not understand how simple the income trust concept is. Businesses are putting together a corporate structure where there are nothing more than shells, flow through entities. That is what is disastrous.

This was why our American colleagues, who know capitalism better than anyone in the world perhaps, balked at it. They recognized how devastating this would be for a business if the earnings simply flowed through to unit holders with no commitment to hang on to any of that money for research and development or to grow the business and hire more people.

The obligation is to meet this insatiable demand for increased revenue to the unit holders. They suck the life out of a corporation. They stuck it dry. It is corporate greed at its ugliest, at its worst embodiment. It is the manifestation of greed run wild for short term gain and long term pain. That is why no country in the world would allow it. That is what was wrong—

An hon. member: Except the Liberals.

Mr. Pat Martin: Except for the Liberals, who lapped it up like lap dogs to corporate Canada. When this was presented to the Liberals, they allowed it to go on for years and years.

I have the figures here for what started out as simply a bad idea by some corporate zealot.

Mr. Charlie Angus: An article of faith for the Liberal Party of Canada.

Mr. Pat Martin: An article of faith, a tenet for the Liberal Party of Canada.

It went from a relatively obscure tax gimmick to $200 billion in capital holdings, an untold lost revenue for Canada in terms of taxation. As that money flows through the shell to the unit holders, the unit holders get taxed as individuals with earnings, but they may be taxed at an entirely different rate. Depending on their personal tax status, they may not pay any.

In actual fact, the lost opportunity has been staggering. It is corporate greed gone wild. The lost opportunity has been devastating. It has been irresponsible. It has been nothing short of stupid to allow it to continue to this point.

We should have spoken out louder. My colleague from Timmins—James Bay and I feel a bit sheepish for not speaking out more loudly the day we learned about this atrocious system. We should have stood up to Bay Street, when the Liberals would not, and said no, that in no uncertain terms would we be the only stupid country in the world allowing this ridiculous situation.

● (1815)

At the shareholders meeting where they voted on whether or not they should convert, one CEO, of an oil and gas company in Alberta that converted, told the shareholders that this would not be allowed forever. He said that he could not believe they were being allowed to do it now but that seeing that it is legal, he advised the shareholders to vote yea on it and convert to an income trust because it was too good to be true. Sure enough, they went ahead and did it and they succeeded.

For many companies it started to snowball. A domino effect took place until it was out of control. Now it is not a popular move. The Liberals have ganged up with the Bloc in trying to find a way to condemn the government for doing what it had to do. I am no big fan of the Conservative Party but this is our opinion too, that the income trust debacle had to be stopped. It had to put the breaks on it and it is irresponsible now to try to reverse that.

We have been following this. The Liberals' record on income trusts has been to do what they do best, which is absolutely nothing. They stood by and watched as this debacle grew.

Independent studies show that income trusts have been over-valued by as much as 40%. Therefore, there is a whole campaign of misinformation. They will eventually drop in value. More than 20% of the business trusts that have come on stream since 2001 are down 20% in value.

What people need to know is that two out of three business trusts are paying out more in dividend earnings to their unit holders than they are bringing in. Is that not a recipe for disaster? Does that pretty much sound the death knell for that particular business because it can only do that for so many years before it will be out of business? That is simply the way this is happening.

Corporations have openly admitted that their attraction to income trusts has been tax avoidance. That is not a very noble thing to guide itself by if a business' sole purpose for restructuring its entire company is that it does not pay its fair share of taxes in this country. Even though we have stripped down the tax rate for businesses in Canada, which are lower than in the United States now, businesses are still looking for ways for wholesale tax avoidance. I call them tax fugitives. I have no respect for people or businesses that do not want to pay their fair share of taxes in this country.

The concern over the resulting loss in tax revenue has been noted by both the federal and all provincial governments irrespective of their political stripe and it is irresponsible for somebody today to be arguing that we should reverse this decision. They have not consulted anybody but the wacko little bunch of activists who have put on the most lame and ineffectual lobbying campaign I have ever seen.

● (1820)

Mr. Charlie Angus: Are you talking about the member for Wascana?

Mr. Pat Martin: No, I am not talking strictly of him. I am talking about the income trust campaign, the income trust unit holders who are lobbying government. We all get the e-mails from them but they have no substance to their arguments. Their only argument is agreed. They want it all and they want it all now, and they do not give a damn what happens 10 years from now to the economy. It is a recipe for economic disaster. It is irresponsible. It is the role of government to step in and intervene when we are on such a disastrous course, when we are riding that bus over the cliff, as somebody said.

The NDP is committed to a dynamic economy. Witness after witness, including the Bank of Canada, supported the NDP's concerns that business income trusts were inappropriate business structures that can undermine the long term growth of a dynamic economic future for Canada.

We need to stay the course and do what is right and get back to a stable financial market and a stable investment culture and atmosphere without this unfortunate hiccup of income trusts.

[*Translation*]

The Speaker: The hon. member for Ottawa—Orléans on a point of order.

* * *

[*English*]

PRIVILEGE

ALLEGED CONDUCT OF MEMBER FOR OTTAWA—ORLÉANS

Mr. Royal Galipeau (Ottawa—Orléans, CPC): Mr. Speaker, this afternoon in the House there was an exchange between the member for Ottawa South and myself and I want to speak to that this evening. I made some efforts to have the member in the House but, unfortunately, it is not so.

The exchange between he and I resulted in a call on his privileges. After that we both met the media outside where I admitted that I should not have crossed the floor to complain about his attack on me. Since I admitted it outside the House, it is only fair that I do so inside the House.

Within 10 minutes I will be presiding over the committee of the whole House and, before that happens, I need to clear the air.

I am sorry to have approached the hon. member for Ottawa South in that manner. As a father, I have often told my children that two wrongs do not make a right. If he wishes, I will still speak with him.

I would hope that all hon. members would respect the fact that as a chair occupant I steer clear of partisanship and that I stick strictly to the impartial running of the proceedings of the House. Since the event occurred, an hon. member from the official opposition has already commended me for that sort of behaviour and I had planned to continue in that way.

The Speaker: I thank the hon. member for Ottawa—Orléans for his statement. I will certainly take it into consideration. In light of what he said, I suspect I will not need to come back to the House but, if necessary, I will be back with a final ruling on the question of privilege raised earlier this day, but I believe that is likely to conclude the matter.

Resuming debate, the hon. member for Halton.

* * *

INCOME TRUSTS

The House resumed consideration of the motion.

Hon. Garth Turner (Halton, Lib.): Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank the hon. member for Ottawa—Orléans for his intervention. He is an honourable gentleman and those of us who have worked with him certainly know he is sincere in what he has just said to the House.

Turning to the topic at hand, it has been six months since, out of the blue, the administration imposed a 31% tax on investors and caused their retirement savings to tumble. Some people ask why we, on this side of the House, keep fighting this move. Why do we tell average taxpayers not to give up? Obviously, we could and that would be the easy path but the easy path is not what we are choosing in this particular instance.

I will give five reasons why we think the income tax trust must be stopped, delayed or at least modified.

First, there, but for the grace of the Minister of Finance, go all the rest of us as taxpayers. If the Minister of Finance and the Prime Minister can impose a crushing new tax on personal investments and wipe away $25 billion in private savings and not care and get away with it, then it will probably happen again. One must ask what the next target will be of the finance department to minimize tax expenditures and to maximize revenues. Will it be to eliminate, to cap or start to tax RRSPs? Will it be to impose a capital gains tax, maybe even a modest one, on the massive real estate capital gains being enjoyed homeowners these days? Let us think about it. Without political accountability anything can happen.

Second, this is a simple betrayal. Many people invested in income trusts or increased their stake precisely because the Minister of Finance and the Prime Minister said that it was okay to do this. They said that they would never tax these investments. The man who is now Prime Minister said that over and again and his very words of course caused an increase in the flow of savings into these vehicles. His very words also encouraged many companies to convert into trust, secure in the knowledge, they thought, that a Conservative government could be counted on to keep its word. Now we know differently.

Third, this shows a profound and deep and troubling lack of respect. Such a draconian move by any government demonstrates that it does not care about individual security and, more worrisome for the government, it does not care about property rights.

The Prime Minister and the Minister of Finance knew well what this move would do to the pool of private savings in Canada: that the tax would depress the market value of all trusts and erase capital. However, they did it anyway. What is worse is that they knew a majority of these income trusts investors were seniors who had no pensions and so pension splitting is of no value to these people whatsoever. There is no offset and many of them are too old to recoup their losses. However, those guys did it anyway. A government that so disrespects seniors is not deserving of our respect.

Fourth, this really hurts the political system. The government was supposed to be different. It promised transparency and it promised consistency with no tricks, not getting elected saying that it would eliminate a tax and then not doing it, just steady Eddie government that we could all count on with a populace streak and a new respect for the common voter. That is what we were told but not so much. In a stroke that changed. It is now politics as usual: say one thing to gain support, get into power and do another, and that sucks.

It proves once again that politicians deserve to have the same standing as used car salesmen, which is what the latest survey shows.

Fifth, this unfairness is overwhelming.

● (1825)

Mr. Dean Del Mastro: Mr. Speaker, I rise on a point of order. I take offence to what the member just said. There are a number of people, and I am certain a number of people in his own riding, who work in the automotive industry and do not deserve to be drawn into disrespect by that member or any other member in the House in the manner that the member has just done. I would ask him to withdraw his comment.

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): The hon. member for Halton is rising on a point of order?

Hon. Garth Turner: No, Mr. Speaker, I am on debate.

● (1830)

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): You have less than a minute to finish.

Hon. Garth Turner: I thank the member for Peterborough for eating up some time uselessly.

As I was saying, Mr. Speaker, my fifth point here is that we have an unfairness this week that is overwhelming.

This past Monday, the Minister of Finance went to Bay Street and at the modest urging of corporate Canada did a flip-flop and all of a sudden eliminated a $1 billion tax loophole from his budget. Yet, he does not have the decency to stand in this House and even apologize to investors from whom he stole twenty-five—

The Acting Speaker (Mr. Royal Galipeau): The time provided for the consideration of private members' business has now expired and the order is dropped to the bottom of the order of precedence on the order paper.

When this matter returns, the hon. member for Halton will have another four minutes.

[*Translation*]

Pursuant to Standing Order 81(4), the House will now go into committee of the whole for the purpose of considering votes under Canadian heritage in the main estimates for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2008.

[*English*]

I now leave the chair for the House to resolve itself into committee of the whole.

GOVERNMENT ORDERS

[*English*]

BUSINESS OF SUPPLY

CANADIAN HERITAGE—MAIN ESTIMATES, 2007-08

(Consideration in committee of the whole of all votes under Canadian Heritage in the main estimates, Mr. Bill Blaikie in the chair)

The Chair: I would like to open this committee of the whole session by making a short statement on the evening's proceedings.

Tonight's debate is a general one on all of the votes under Canadian Heritage. Each member will be allocated 15 minutes. The first round will begin with the official opposition, followed by the government, the Bloc Québécois and the New Democratic Party. After that, we will follow the usual proportional rotation.

[*Translation*]

As provided in the order adopted earlier this week, parties may use each 15-minute slot for speeches or to question the Minister. The Chair would appreciate it if the first member speaking in each slot would indicate how the time will be used, particularly if it is to be shared by one or more members.

[*English*]

In the case of speeches, members of the party to which the period is allotted may speak one after the other. When time is to be used for questions and answers, the Chair will expect that the minister's response will reflect approximately the time taken by the question since this time will be counted in the time originally allotted to the party. However, in the interest of a full exchange, I am prepared to exercise discretion and flexibility in the application of these rules.

Although members may speak more than once, the Chair will generally try to ensure that all members wishing to speak are heard before inviting members to speak again, while respecting the proportional party rotations for speakers. Members need not be in their own seats to be recognized.

[*Translation*]

I would remind hon. members that, according to the special order, during this evening's debate, no quorum calls, dilatory motions or requests for unanimous consent shall be entertained.

● (1835)

[*English*]

As in the House, ministers and members should be referred to by their title or riding name and of course, all remarks should be addressed through the Chair.

I ask for everyone's cooperation in upholding all established standards of decorum, parliamentary language and behaviour.

At the conclusion of tonight's debate, the committee will rise, the estimates under Canadian Heritage will be deemed reported, and the House will adjourn immediately until tomorrow.

We may now begin tonight's session. The House in committee of the whole pursuant to Standing Order 81(4)(a), the first appointed day, consideration in committee of the whole of all votes under Canadian Heritage in the main estimates for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2008.

Just to clear up any confusion such as existed on a previous evening, we will start the clock now.

For the first 15 minutes, the hon. member for Churchill.

Ms. Tina Keeper (Churchill, Lib.): Mr. Chair, I will be splitting my time with the members for Laval—Les Îles and Beaches—East York. I will be asking five minutes of questions, as will each of those two members.

After inheriting the best financial picture in Canadian history, a $13 billion surplus from the previous Liberal government, this minister has not made a commitment to her portfolio.

She has failed artists. She has failed women. She has failed youth. She has failed museums. She has failed volunteers. She has failed to protect the integrity of the Canadian identity.

Why could she not protect her programs from her cabinet colleagues when they decided to "trim the fat"?

Hon. Bev Oda (Minister of Canadian Heritage and Status of Women, CPC): Mr. Chair, I would suggest that we have accomplished a great deal in a year and a half.

In fact, I would ask members across the way to stand up for programs and stand up for Canadians. I would suggest that they ask themselves when it was their responsibility to take care of taxpayers' money and to make sure that it was utilized effectively, where did $40 million go? It went into the Liberal Party.

I would also suggest that—

The Chair: Order, please. I am sorry, but the answer can only take as long as the question.

The hon. member for Churchill.

Ms. Tina Keeper: Mr. Chair, the minister has no voice at the cabinet table. The fact that her government had $160 million of aboriginal language funding is reprehensible. It reeks of the misguided and racist residential school policy.

Where has the minister redirected these funds?

Hon. Bev Oda: Mr. Chair, how can that member and that party question us on aboriginal school policy? We actually settled the aboriginal school agreement.

Where was that member? Where were the women in that party who stood by and did nothing about matrimonial property rights for aboriginal women? Where were they when we saw that Canada was on a watch list for human—

The Chair: Order, please. The hon. member for Churchill.

Ms. Tina Keeper: Mr. Chair, I will remind the minister that her government actually cut back the residential school package.

This minister sat back and watched the Canadian television fund nearly collapse. Now the Conservative appointed CRTC chair is calling for lighter regulation and increased dependence on market forces.

When it comes to arts and culture, all this government provides is rhetoric, no commitment. Why is the Conservative government committed to the Americanization of our Canadian identity?

Hon. Bev Oda: Mr. Chair, first of all, let us have the actual facts. There was no cutback in the aboriginal school agreement. There was no agreement.

We know the importance of the Canadian television fund. That is why I made a $100 million commitment not only for one year as the previous government always used to do but for two years because Canadian content is important and our production industry is very important.

Ms. Tina Keeper: Mr. Chair, in the 2006 election the Conservatives promised to introduce a new national museums policy. This is another example of a Conservative broken promise. Since then, they have cut $4.6 million to the museums assistance program.

I asked the minister this the other day and I will ask it again. Why does the minister care so little about heritage in rural Canada?

● (1840)

Hon. Bev Oda: Mr. Chair, that is an example of just talking about a policy. Real action means $100 million to improve the infrastructure of our cultural institutions. It means $10 million for student apprenticeships at our museums. It means a commitment to a national human rights museum. It means that we are going to be working because we know what our responsibilities are regarding our museums.

Ms. Tina Keeper: Mr. Chair, hundreds upon hundreds of museums across this great country of ours are committed to preserving the heritage of their region. They rely on volunteers. They rely on summer students. They relied on the museums assistance program.

How is it that the minister believes that they can continue to do their work?

Hon. Bev Oda: Mr. Chair, the party opposite can obsess about $2.3 million, but in fact we have increased our commitment to museums by $4.6 million. The member spoke about the assistance that museums require. That is why we have committed $10 million for student—

The Chair: The member for Laval—Les Îles.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Raymonde Folco (Laval—Les Îles, Lib.): Mr. Chair, the Liberal government's action plan for official languages expires in 2008.

Does the minister intend to renew this action plan which has proven so vital to English and French linguistic minorities?

Hon. Josée Verner (Minister of International Cooperation and Minister for la Francophonie and Official Languages, CPC): Everyone knows, Mr. Chair, that our government is committed to promoting linguistic duality. As we speak, we are evaluating the initiatives proposed in the action plan. Also, discussions are already underway with the communities and various groups, as emphasized by—

The Chair: The hon. member for Laval—Les Îles.

Ms. Raymonde Folco: Mr. Chair, a year and a half into its mandate, this government is still at the evaluation stage. Of the 37 federal agencies and institutions assessed by the commissioner, 23 had not reviewed their policies and programs to determine their impact on the development of official language minority communities.

Could the minister tell us why?

Hon. Josée Verner: Mr. Chair, if that is where my colleague is going, I will tell her what the former Commissioner of Official Languages noted in her annual report. She wrote that, during the first year of implementation of the action plan, she could not tell exactly what the Liberals had done or how much they had invested.

Our government intends to strictly follow the existing action plan, and we will continue to do so.

Ms. Raymonde Folco: Mr. Chair, in response to the question on the action plan that expires in 2008, I am hearing nothing but empty words.

[*English*]

I would like to know what measures the minister intends to institute to enforce the regular reporting from these federal institutions that have not—I am sorry, I am on the wrong question. I beg your pardon.

[*Translation*]

The minister voted in favour of Bill S-3, whereby the government is committed to ensuring that positive measures are taken to implement these commitments to enhance the vitality of the English and French minorities and to support their development.

How does the minister reconcile her vote with the fact that she did not oppose the cancellation of the court challenges program?

Hon. Josée Verner: Mr. Chair, I would simply like to remind the hon. member that I said earlier that there was an evaluation process underway for the action plan and that we had already begun the consultations with different groups. We are doing our job and we are preparing for beyond 2008.

Ms. Raymonde Folco: Mr. Chair, we do not know what form this will take in 2008. Since this is indeed a matter for consultation, there are obligations under section 43(2) of Part VII of the Act. Can the minister tell us what consultations have been held by her department? How were they conducted and with whom? Was this done before Human Resources and Social Development Canada cut funding from the literacy program?

I would like a more substantial and detailed response from the minister for once, and not what is written in the book.

● (1845)

Hon. Josée Verner: Mr. Chair, I think that if the hon. member bothered to listen to the response she would hear a clear response from our party. What I said was that since we have been in power we have already signed agreements worth over $1 billion with the provinces, territories and communities. Furthermore, in our last budget, we announced an additional $30 million for youth and the promotion of linguistic duality across the country. The hon. member should justify why she voted against this measure.

Ms. Raymonde Folco: Mr. Chair, that is what governing is all about: having to answer to the Canadian people. The government has to answer, not the opposition. In light of the obligations set out in part VII, I would like to know how the minister will help with funding of the literacy program with respect to francophone and anglophone linguistic minorities across Canada.

Hon. Josée Verner: Mr. Chair, the member must know that in the action plan funds are allocated to literacy, and those funds are still there. I will tell her that at the beginning of April, I was in New Brunswick to announce programs and pilot projects for francophone minority day care centres.

[*English*]

Hon. Maria Minna (Beaches—East York, Lib.): Mr. Chair, 12 out of the 16 regional Status of Women Canada offices have closed. Many rural women have no access to the Internet or transportation. The rural women aided by these offices feel totally isolated because they now have no help from officials.

Why has the minister chosen to abandon women in rural Canada?

Hon. Bev Oda: Mr. Chair, in fact, we are providing real action to the women in rural Canada. Because we have been able to directly benefit women in their communities through non-profit organizations, we have seen fine projects such as those that we have recently approved from Prince Edward Island. The rural community women will now be able to undertake starting up their own—

The Chair: The hon. member for Beaches—East York.

Hon. Maria Minna: Mr. Chair, women from Canada's farming communities presented a heartbreaking account of poverty faced by many families on small family farms. The irony in their appearance at the committee is that they will no longer be able to present before the committee because the government will not fund advocacy work. This very valuable information will go unheard by Parliament. Why is the minister shutting these women out?

Hon. Bev Oda: Mr. Chair, I come from a riding that is very highly agriculture. I do my job. I meet with the women and the families in my riding who are from farm families. That is the responsibility of every member in the House.

Hon. Maria Minna: Mr. Chair, the minister has eliminated equality as the main goal of the women's program, the policy research fund, advocacy for women, legal status and political rights. At the same time, women continue to be underpaid and underemployed and they still experience violence. Only 20% of the House of Commons are women.

Does the minister believe this is how to solve these problems and advocating for women? Why has the minister silenced their voices?

Hon. Bev Oda: Mr. Chair, the government is doing more than just advocating. We are actually acting. We are not satisfied to watch our country be put on a watch list for human trafficking, and we did something about it.

We are moving to keep our communities safer and women and children safe in their communities,with 11 justice bills that the opposition is holding back. We are providing help to every family with our child care benefit tax. We are improving the situation through the work—

The Chair: The hon. member for Beaches—East York.

Hon. Maria Minna: Mr. Chair, it would help if the minister answers some of the questions.

[*Translation*]

The Quebec organization Regroupement Naissance-Renaissance was refused funding because its members are fighting for women's rights.

Why does this government make policies based on its neo-conservative ideology and not on the realities facing Canadian women every day?

[*English*]

Hon. Bev Oda: Mr. Chair, unlike the previous government, we do not approve applications depending on political views. We approve programs and proposals on the merits and we measure how directly they will improve the situation for women. In fact, we want to ensure women see a difference in their lives.

● (1850)

Hon. Maria Minna: Mr. Chair, she is not answering any of the questions directly, and being insulting is not the way to do it.

The National Association of Women and the Law has received funding for over 30 years. It works to protect women's legal rights. It now has to get out of its lease because the government is turning its back on legal rights for women.

Why is the minister shutting women up? We want equality.

Hon. Bev Oda: Once again, Mr. Chair, we are just talking about associations. This government, this party, this minister is talking about women, women who live in their communities, women who are trying to raise their children. We are now going to ensure that they see a difference and improvement in their lives, not just talk about associations.

The Chair: Order, please. I am sorry but the 15 minutes are up.

Before I proceed to the next section, when these evenings were conceived, it was conceived as a time when there could actually be some orderly, intelligent, rational discussion. It cannot happen if people on both sides are constantly yelling at whoever has the floor on the other side. That is happening on both sides of the House.

I would plead with hon. members to forget about question period dynamics and actually try to do something different here tonight and listen to whoever has the floor. Your party will have a chance in due course.

The hon. Minister of Canadian Heritage.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Bev Oda (Minister of Canadian Heritage and Status of Women, CPC): Mr. Chair, this is the first opportunity that I have to share with the House the work done by the Department of Canadian Heritage under the Conservative government.

[*English*]

With me tonight are the Minister of International Cooperation and Minister for la Francophonie and Official Languages, the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs and International Trade and Sport, the Secretary of State for Multiculturalism, the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Works, the Pacific Gateway and the Vancouver-Whistler Olympics and the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Canadian Heritage.

Without a doubt, the Department of Canadian Heritage has an important and very broad mandate, with issues including sports, official languages, status of women and culture.

The government believes that all of these areas need and deserve support because they are important to Canadians. Each contributes to our Canadian way of life. They say what we are as a people, give expression to our values and tell of our unique histories and heritage. That is why we wholeheartedly supported the UNESCO Convention on the Protection and Promotion on the Diversity of Cultural Expressions.

[*Translation*]

The convention, which came into effect on March 18, sets basic rules, so that the countries will maintain policies and promote culture. It recognizes the importance of cultural diversity in international, economic and social development. Canada was the first country to accept the convention. We will continue to be an international leader in the promotion of the convention, and in its implementation.

I announced that in June we intend to propose Canada's candidacy to be a member of the intergovernmental committee. We will also propose to host the first meeting of that committee, here in Ottawa, and to contribute to the committee's fund, so that it can continue its work.

[*English*]

However, it is not only on the international front that arts and culture must be supported. We must ensure that the support needed for our Canadian cultural industries are available and effective here in Canada.

This evening I will highlight a few areas where our government has acted through Canadian Heritage and Status of Women in our first year and a half in office. The government does support arts and culture and has done so in demonstrable ways. We have taken a number of steps to ensure that our support is effective, efficient and accountable to the Canadian public.

Over the past year, I have had over 200 meetings with artists and representatives of arts organizations around Canada to identify the priorities in this area. We want to ensure that resources will be invested in a focused fashion, achieving our goals and objectives. For me, this means setting priorities for investment, having a clear idea of the results to be achieved and reporting on those results.

The Canada Council, celebrating its 50th anniversary this year, is the federal government's primary agency supporting artistic excellence. In our very first budget, we committed a new $50 million to the Canada Council. This increase has resulted in the largest single grants contribution in the 50 year history of the funding agency. This new funding has brought in support to organizations such as les Grands Ballets Canadiens, le Théâtre du nouveau monde, le Musée des beaux-arts du Canada. This is an addition to the $150 million provided to the Canada Council for its work in every sector of the performing, visual, sound and new media arts world.

● (1855)

Moreover, our government believes that much can be achieved through partnership. Partnerships are an effective means to nurture, develop and sustain the arts sector, to leverage increased resources in support of the arts. It is a genuine indicator of public support for our cultural activities and organizations. That means partnerships with other levels of government, with business, with individuals and with the arts and cultural stakeholders themselves.

Through a new innovative mechanism, our government has made it more attractive for individuals and corporations to invest in the arts. In budget 2006 we removed the capital gains tax from gifts of publicly listed securities to charities. In its first year this measure has generated an estimated $20 million for the arts.

In budget 2007 we went even further. Building on this initiative, we extended the elimination of the capital gains tax on donations of publicly listed securities to private foundations. I am confident that this will also benefit the arts community.

I am very proud that the government recognizes the importance of local arts and heritage activities across Canada. They bring neighbours and families together to build stronger communities. They showcase local talent, encourage community participation and volunteerism, while providing a venue for celebration of our rich, artistic roots and heritage. That is why in budget 2007 we announced $60 million for the next two years to strengthen the cultural experiences of Canadians through events celebrating local arts and heritage.

The department is now holding consultations to establish the criteria for that future program. We will ensure that this new program will truly support activities that are meaningful to the community.

[*Translation*]

We will not let these resources be used for political purposes by one party, as the Liberal government did. This is why the process to develop the program, the criteria and the strict guidelines will not be completed before the fall.

[*English*]

With $50 million of new funding for the Canada Council, two new tax incentives to support the arts and $60 million for local arts and heritage activities, Canada's new government has clearly demonstrated its commitment and support for the arts sector in our first two budgets.

I would now like to show how Canada's new government is providing meaningful support to our museums in Canada.

Our government recognizes that our museums are the keepers of our history and treasures that tell the stories of our past.They collect and preserve our treasures and artifacts for generations to come. That is why in 2007 and 2008 we will be spending over $267 million on museums across Canada.

Our first priority must be our federal museums that maintain the story of Canada as a country. After years of neglect our national museums were in serious need of physical repairs and improvements.

In December I announced an additional $100 million for our national cultural institutions to address this urgent infrastructure need. This new investment will complement my department's cultural spaces Canada program that on a smaller scale supports the improvement, renovation and construction of arts and heritage facilities throughout Canada. In addition, the arts and heritage sustainability program invests in improvements in the managing of those museums and contributes an additional $1.8 million. At the same time the museums assistance program receives an annual budget of $9.6 million.

Finally, in our most recent budget we committed $10 million over the next two years for student internships in museums. Canadian museums had been requesting this additional help in this area for years. Under the previous Liberal government, only one-third of the needs in student employment was met. This measure was long overdue.

As I stated earlier, our commitment to Canada's museums totals $267 million.

I would now like to address the Status of Women portfolio. In budget 2007 we announced an additional $20 million over two years for women's programming, which included the $5 million for 2007-08 that I announced on March 7. This will bring the total budget for Status of Women Canada to $29.9 million, which represents the highest funding level ever in the history of this agency. With this new allocation, Canada's new government reiterated its support for the full participation of women in the economic, social and cultural life of Canada.

In keeping with the government's priorities, Status of Women Canada will provide strategic investments to implement tangible measures in key areas to improve the economic security of women and to continue to counter violence against women and young girls in Canadian society.

The women's program now has two components: the women's community fund to support projects undertaken at the local, regional and national levels—

● (1900)

The Chair: Order. I am sorry to interrupt the minister but rules do require that there be a 10 minute speech and then five minutes left for questions and comments. I let the minister go on past the 10 minutes now, so I really must give the floor to someone else from the Conservative Party, if there is a question or comment to be made.

I have already extended a certain amount of leniency to the minister thinking she was going wrap up and knew what the rules of the game were.

The hon. member for Cambridge.

Mr. Gary Goodyear (Cambridge, CPC): Mr. Chair, I ask the hon. minister if I could hear her conclusion please.

Hon. Bev Oda: Mr. Chair, the other program will be the women's partnership fund that will support projects by non-governmental organizations in collaboration with other levels of government or federal departments and agencies. This will make a genuine difference in the lives of Canadian women.

Just this past weekend I was in Saint John, New Brunswick at the Urban Core Support Network and I met women who are determined to work their way out of poverty. We are supporting them. They will now be able to move toward a more financially secure future for themselves and their children. These programs will directly assist women in their daily lives and begin to address their genuine needs.

In conclusion, Canada's new government provided $1.4 billion for the Department of Canadian Heritage in its first budget. This was a $130 million increase over the previous government's support. As for the department's portfolio, total resources in 2006-07 amounted to $2 billion. This was an increase of $60 million over the previous government.

Canada's new government has in fact provided $240 million of new funding to support Canadian arts and culture: $50 million for the Canada Council; $100 million in infrastructure funding for our national cultural institutions; $60 million for arts and heritage activities; $10 million for student apprenticeships in museums; and our new tax incentives have generated $20 million in donations to the arts. As well, there is $20 million in new programming funding at the Status of Women Canada. This is real support. This is delivering for Canadians.

● (1905)

Mrs. Joy Smith (Kildonan—St. Paul, CPC): Mr. Chair, I would like to thank the minister for her clear commitment to the modernization of Status of Women Canada. Her dedication is evident and admirable.

I listened with interest to the minister's description of projects geared to having a direct impact on the lives of women in our communities. I am wondering if the hon. minister could elaborate on the importance of funding organizations that have a direct benefit on the ground in local communities.

In my travels to other ridings, I have encountered a number of different women's organizations that were not aware of the changes at Status of Women. In fact, a number of the groups that I spoke with have never received money from the government and were not aware that funding was even available.

As a member of the Standing Committee on the Status of Women I have had to listen to the outrageous accusations of the Liberal and NDP members. They were content to have Status of Women provide advocacy funding for their lobbyist friends.

Could the minister take a few minutes to tell us about some of these projects that have received funding and why we needed to modernize the terms and conditions at Status of Women?

Hon. Bev Oda: Mr. Chair, as I indicated in my presentation, we are providing funding and support for thousands of organizations that are working daily on behalf of women to make a difference in the lives of women in communities. That is what we are doing. We are giving support to organizations such as the one I visited in Saint John, New Brunswick.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Maka Kotto (Saint-Lambert, BQ): Mr. Chair, I will make a short statement and then get to my questions.

Since coming to power, the Conservative government has adopted an approach that involves controlling the message, and perhaps even the messenger. Fueled by its diehard dogmatism, this government, which would advocate an unrestricted, free market and unbridled capitalism, the most exaggerated incarnation of which is the Minister of Industry, clearly established the benchmarks for what we must think from now on.

A free-market, one-track approach and magical thinking—there you have the Conservative government's ideology. Anyone who has the nerve to think differently becomes suspect, if not dangerous.

Thus, to raise questions about the mission in Afghanistan would be to defend the Taliban. To suggest that telecommunications need regulation would mean judging businesses negatively. What demagoguery is this?

These defenders of one-track thinking, these Wyatt Earps of law and order who prefer the bayonet to the pen—they have no interest in the cultural development of Quebec and Canada, that much is clear. With their unconventional view of society, artists, who develop perspectives, are disturbing because their message is uncontrolled. In these circumstances, it is no surprise that the budget reflects this indifference to culture. However, we did not think that the Conservatives would demonstrate such boorish logic, such a Neanderthal attitude, to the point of threatening cultural development. No.

There are many examples of this, but too many to list them all in the time I have.

Thus, I will begin with the Canada Council, since I assume the minister will be tempted to boast about the work of her government on this topic, although I plan to dampen that temptation, I dare say, straight away.

I would remind the House that, as a result of combined pressure from the Canadian Arts Coalition, the Mouvement pour les arts et les lettres and the Bloc Québécois, in November 2005, the Liberal minister, Liza Frulla, announced a $300 million increase in the Canada Council's budget over three years.

The Conservatives did not take long to toss that commitment into the garbage can.

They might try to tell us that they increased the budget by $50 million, by $20 million the first year and another $30 million the second, but in reality, this is a shortfall of $100 million for the cultural community under this government. This community, as we all know, has many spokespeople with imaginations that go beyond the bounds of the lacklustre neo-conservative universe.

Next year, no money is budgeted, and that could mean a return to the $150 million starting point, that is, $250 million less than announced in November 2005.

If they had a majority government, they would happily, and without hesitation, cut the Canada Council's budget. The minister can brag about the $50 million for the Canada Council, but we know —the arts community knows—that this little breather is in jeopardy with the potential arrival of—God help us—a Conservative majority.

Cutting funding for artists is what their friends the oil companies are doing, in fact.

Let us be realistic. The highly anticipated museum policy—not updated since 1972—promised by this minister has so far resulted in nothing but cuts to the museums assistance program—museums, places that promote culture, timeless places that showcase who we were, who we will be and who we could be. To jeopardize the future of museums, as they are doing, is to jeopardize our collective memory.

I am trying to see the mercantile logic. Is money, then, not making identity and creativity unimportant? Not a cent was given to the feature film fund. Not a cent was given to contribute to the incredible boom in Quebec cinema, which Canadian Heritage is too dim to recognize.

The minister knows that production costs are increasing and that her stubborn determination to freeze budgets is contributing to the decline in our only national cinema: Quebec cinema.

Everything she touches falters. This minister is the worst thing that has happened to Quebec culture since *Angelo, Fredo et Romeo*.

Behind all this the message is dictatorial, creativity is stifled and imagination is ostracized. In very little time the minister's work has wreaked havoc and this must stop right now.

● (1910)

Jean-Luc Godard said that when people started talking to him about culture he got out his cheque book. That is what I invite the minister to do as soon as possible.

Can the minister promise to renew and improve next year's budget for the Canada Council or can we expect this $30 million to be non-renewable?

[*English*]

Hon. Bev Oda: Mr. Chair, I think the government has demonstrated that it has a balanced approach to those issues that are very important.

First, we believe we need a strong economy. The stronger the families and individuals are they can then can participate in all aspects of Canadian life, including the arts and cultural aspect of Canadian life.

These Canadians are hard-working and we are going to ensure that they have more of their money and less is sent to Ottawa to be wasted. We are ensuring that the money they send is going to be used effectively. In fact, the funding for the Canada Council, the new funding that we provided has meant that there is new money for the Montreal company Danse Par B.L.eux, the Nunavut Independent Television Network, the Canadian Opera Company in Toronto—

The Chair: Order, please. I am sorry, the question the member asked after his speech was very brief and the minister has now had time to answer.

The hon. member for Saint-Lambert.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Maka Kotto: Mr. Chair, artists are among the lowest income citizens in Canada and Quebec. Attacks on artists are attacks on financially shaky people. Making our streets safer or cutting the GST by one percentage point is not the answer to the challenges they are facing.

What concrete action does the government intend to take to help artists increases their incomes?

[*English*]

Hon. Bev Oda: Mr. Chair, we are ensuring that we create a cultural industry, a production industry, a music industry and a film industry that are going to be able to reap the rewards of their hard work. We are working on international development through our trade routes program and through increased funding to the Canada Council. International marketplace opportunities will open up.

We will also ensure, because I note that artists also have families et cetera, that we free them up so they can pursue their creative endeavours.

● (1915)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Maka Kotto: Mr. Chair, the Bloc Québécois has introduced a bill to give the self-employed, including artists, access to employment insurance.

Does the minister support this initiative?

[*English*]

Hon. Bev Oda: Mr. Chair, we are aware of the initiatives taken by every province in the country in support of their artistic communities. We see that they provide tax credit systems, just as we do on the federal level. We know Quebec has initiatives and laws to address the needs of its artists. We have also seen other provinces take that initiative. We are monitoring all those.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Maka Kotto: Mr. Chair, several countries such as the United Kingdom have laws allowing income averaging over a number of years, varying between three and five.

Would she be in favour of legislation to that effect?

[*English*]

Hon. Bev Oda: Mr. Chair, as I indicated, we are monitoring the financial situation of our artists community and we are going to address their real needs.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Maka Kotto: Mr. Chair, in their last budget, $30 million was announced for an assistance program for festivals and cultural events.

For one thing, could the minister tell us why her insipid little questionnaire was distributed only to Conservative MPs?

[*English*]

Hon. Bev Oda: Mr. Chair, I believe members of Parliament know their communities, know their ridings and know all the events in their communities the best, and they should know that. That is why I have given them an opportunity to have input into the consultation process.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Maka Kotto: Mr. Chair, summer is festival season.

Are we to understand that every festival scheduled for this summer will have to do without her new program?

[*English*]

Hon. Bev Oda: Mr. Chair, it happened last year as well. This program was announced in our budget and it is one that will be effective. We will not slipshod a new program and have it misused as it was by the previous government. That is why we will do our due diligence in setting up a framework, and the proper terms and conditions.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Maka Kotto: Mr. Chair, the Canadian festivals coalition has submitted a list of standardized criteria for the development of a new program. Is the minister planning to use standardized criteria or is she waiting to get the questionnaires back from the MPs to start working on this new program?

[*English*]

Hon. Bev Oda: Mr. Chair, that will be taken into consideration. I am looking forward to meeting with the coalition as well to discuss its suggestions to us.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Maka Kotto: Mr. Chair, in the last campaign, the Conservatives promised to develop a new museums policy. Why did they renege on their promise?

[*English*]

Hon. Bev Oda: Mr. Chair, we indicated that we would be looking at the museums and our government's approach to them. I would suggest that a year and a half in office is not necessarily breaking a promise. We have done effective, real work in supporting the museums, our national museums and museums across the country.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Maka Kotto: Mr. Chair, when can we see this new museums policy?

[*English*]

Hon. Bev Oda: Mr. Chair, this reminds me of when I was a teacher. The students would always ask when rather than what about the content.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Maka Kotto: Mr. Chair, does the minister feel that the museums community is doing better since she has been in office, and why? Might I remind her that the community will be listening closely.

[*English*]

Hon. Bev Oda: Mr. Chair, in fact I do. I see that the touring program of our museums has increased attendance at the museums. I also see that the attendance by Canadians to museums across the country has improved and is continuing to improve.

This means the museums are meaningful, but they are also presenting and giving something to Canadians that they value.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Maka Kotto: Mr. Chair, film production costs are increasing but Telefilm's budget does not. In fact, Telefilm can finance fewer and fewer films when Quebec moviegoers want more and more. Why is the minister refusing to increase the feature film fund?

[*English*]

Hon. Bev Oda: Mr. Chair, I have met with Quebec filmmakers and they have put forward four proposals to me. Those proposals are being reviewed right now. I know Telefilm is also reviewing its support for the film industry.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Maka Kotto: Mr. Chair, the objective of the feature film fund is to attract 5% of moviegoers, a percentage that was reached long ago in Quebec. Does the minister believe that the fund should take into account the different challenges facing the Quebec and Canadian film industries?

● (1920)

[*English*]

Hon. Bev Oda: Mr. Chair, as I indicated, we are reviewing the proposals put forward. I know Telefilm is also reviewing its support for the feature film industry.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Maka Kotto: Mr. Chair, despite the fact that the fund has played a critical role in the development of Quebec film industry, it does not contribute to the development of the film industry in all parts of Quebec. What does the minister intend to do to stimulate the development of culture in general and of cinema in particular in all regions of Quebec?

[*English*]

Hon. Bev Oda: Mr. Chair, I met and addressed the Quebec APTQ convention just recently. I indicated that I wanted to address production outside of the major cities of Quebec and Montreal. I have asked Telefilm to do the same.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Maka Kotto: Mr. Chair, does the minister believe that Canadian Heritage should officially recognize the existence of a Quebec cinema distinct from Canadian cinema?

[*English*]

Hon. Bev Oda: Mr. Chair, we do recognize that. That is why we set up a francophone secretariat. In my discussions I have been very clear. I recognize the marketplace is different, the environment is different, the size of the international marketplace is different for them. That is why we want to bring forward programs and support that will be relevant to their situation.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Maka Kotto: Mr. Chair, I come back to museums. Cutting the museum support program has been the only concrete measure, with a significant impact, that the minister has offered the museum community. How can she justify her cuts?

[*English*]

Hon. Bev Oda: Mr. Chair, in my presentation I said that we seemed to obsess about a $2.3 million cut, when we had in fact provided more assistance to the museums. As I have said, we will now be contributing $267 million to museums in Canada. This is an increase over the previous government's commitment.

Mr. Charlie Angus (Timmins—James Bay, NDP): Mr. Chair, I am very pleased to be here with the minister tonight. I left my gang at home, so it is just me with questions. I am sure the minister and her friends will be more than willing to work through these questions. My time allotted is not much, so I will be asking a number of shorter questions because we have a lot to talk about.

I am interested in a number of issues in terms of media concentration. I am not going to get into CRTC issues. It is not really relevant to the issue tonight. However, I am very interested in any steps concerning the CanWest and Goldman Sachs takeover of Alliance Atlantis.

As the minister will know, we are in a situation where Goldman Sachs will be picking up the entire film library of Canada as part of this deal. That film library will most likely be spun off and we have no idea what steps are being taken to protect the Canadian film library.

What steps is the minister taking, if any, to meet with the principals to ensure that there will be a clear set of rules as to what will happen to our film library of Canada?

Hon. Bev Oda: Mr. Chair, there is a process and these transactions must go through the Competition Bureau as well as the CRTC.

The Competition Bureau looks at the marketplace and looks at the economic development of the industries. The CRTC has the primary responsibility regarding Canadian content. There is a clear set of principles and it is based in the Broadcasting Act.

The CRTC will review every transaction of this kind and ensure that the results end with a benefit to Canadians and also ensure that we have a strong Canadian content presence in our media sector.

Mr. Charlie Angus: Mr. Chair, that does not really answer the question at all. The CRTC will not deal with what will happen to the entire catalogue. We are talking about the entire history of Canadian film, our legacy that millions and millions of Canadian taxpayer dollars have gone into.

Surely to God she would not think the Competition Bureau would deal with that. We are talking about our Canadian heritage. I am asking the minister what steps she will take to ensure that there is not some quick pump and dump to some company that is going to walk off with the entire catalogue of Canadian film.

● (1925)

Hon. Bev Oda: Mr. Chair, having experience with the CRTC, I can assure the member that the CRTC will take its responsibility and look at all the outcomes. I do not want to pre-suggest that we know what the outcomes are. This process is just in its initial stages. All information put forward with the CRTC will be taken into consideration, and I, as the minister, will be monitoring its process.

Mr. Charlie Angus: Mr. Chair, I am interested in this issue. We have heard numerous horror stories through our office of massive funding delays in arts programming. I did a little check through the minister's office.

As of the 10th month of this year past, only 38% of the arts policy budget had been spent. Citizenship and Heritage was at 37%. Multiculturalism was at 12.7%. Official languages was 29%, but with recent events that is not surprising. The cultural spaces program was 14%. Yet the minister's communication budget was 82.6%.

Why such a paltry, pathetic spending, why has she spent so much money on spin doctors? Maybe she should consider hiring some other ones.

Hon. Bev Oda: Mr. Chair, unfortunately for Canadians, when we hear a whole bunch of figures being arbitrarily pulled out of the air and used to make such accusations, it is not really responsible. Is the member opposite aware of what deadlines those applications were facing, what stage in the due process they were facing?

I make no apologies in ensuring that we have done our due diligence on behalf of Canadians, and that the support that we give as a federal government is going to meaningful organizations to make a real difference in real support to these organizations.

Mr. Charlie Angus: Mr. Chair, would the minister then be able to tell us, if she has done her due diligence, how much of the money that has been promised has actually been spent out of her department?

Hon. Bev Oda: Mr. Chair, I want to be realistic about this. The department processes 7,000 applications annually, and it depends on the program. We have multiple programs that we are processing. To be realistic as to say as of this day, this minute, this week, et cetera, this is a continual thing.

As members know, we are making announcements. Those organizations are being made aware of where support going to be given. Our lapse is only about 1.5—

The Chair: The member for Timmins—James.

Mr. Charlie Angus: Mr. Chair, it is interesting that she cannot come up with that figure because a member of her party, my dear friend from Abbotsford, had the numbers of how much the Liberals did not spend under the MAP. He had that at his fingertips, but she does not have that here with all her stuff.

I want to take the minister back to the interesting week of April 14 to 23 when she sent the memo to all Conservative Party members inviting them to respond to her personal email for the summer festivals program. When I asked her a question, she stood up in the House and she mentioned that the member for Windsor West had contacted her. I would like to ask her why she mentioned his name?

Hon. Bev Oda: Mr. Chair, as I reiterated in the House, we had been getting many requests from members from all parties for festival funding. As I indicated, there was a fund that supported festivals and unfortunately, that became the sponsorship fund. That is why that fund was cancelled. This government will support local festivals and activities, but we will do it with accountability, transparency and—

The Chair: The hon. member for Timmins—James Bay.

Mr. Charlie Angus: Mr. Chair, why did the minister not tell the House that week that she had sent him a buzz off letter saying she had no idea about any festival funding and that he should go to a charity. She did not tell the House that. Then we find out that that very week she was at the Lake Scugog council where she told it to get its ideas together because the fund was coming. That week she was telling her own riding that it had a chance at this program, but she did not tell that to the member for Windsor West.

In fact, when she was asked about that, she said there were lots of festivals and that MPs know about all kinds of festivals. She mentioned midnight madness and yet her own newspaper said that midnight madness festival does not exist, it is not a festival. Under what criteria would she think a midnight madness sidewalk sale is a credible festival?

● (1930)

Hon. Bev Oda: Mr. Chair, obviously, with no criteria that festival or activity would not qualify. That is why I wanted to make sure that everybody understood that we wanted to set up proper criteria.

In fact, I have told members of his party as well that there is no program framework and there is no criteria. If he would like to work on behalf of his constituents, he could input meaningful criteria to support his festivals.

Mr. Charlie Angus: Mr. Chair, she says that it is our role as MPs to partake in this, when the summer jobs program has just announced that MPs are not going to be involved anymore. That is being taken away from MPs.

The fact is that the minister does not understand her office. It is not her job to send personal emails to MPs asking for pet projects when there is no criteria and no application. It is not her job to usurp the role of the ministry.

When she was caught giving the Conservatives a head start, she tried to implicate the rest of us members of Parliament to partake in this by bringing our little goodie bags as well. I think she should explain that to the House. Does she not think that is a misuse of her office, when the role of the minister is to set policy and let her bureaucrats establish the criteria and accept the funding projects?

Hon. Bev Oda: Mr. Chair, I know what my responsibilities are, as does every member of this government.

Our responsibility is to use taxpayers' dollars respectfully and meaningfully, not to create a works program that only supports Wal-Mart, and not to just give money and jobs to riding associations. It is not our responsibility to create a program that ends up in sponsorship with $40 million going to a political party.

We were elected because Canadians wanted a change. They wanted us to clean it up and make sure their dollars are going to be used in the most meaningful manner.

Mr. Charlie Angus: Mr. Chair, the minister had to bring her gang with her to back her up because she did not want to come in here on her own.

A week ago I was approached by someone in the festivals program who wanted me to tell them that the Minister of Canadian Heritage was not pretending in the House of Commons that a sidewalk sale was a festival.

I would like to ask her again. Under what criteria would she think in any God's universe a sidewalk sale in her riding would fit in? She said it was a legitimate festival, yet her own newspaper contradicted her. Where does she think that would fit in? What kind of criteria?

Hon. Bev Oda: Mr. Chair, I just said that would not be eligible because it is neither a cultural nor an arts or heritage festival.

Mr. Chair, do you know why these people and my colleagues are here? It is because they believe this is an important issue. This is important to Canadians. It is important to Canadian life and it is important to us as a country.

Mr. Charlie Angus: Mr. Chair, the volunteer initiative was cancelled when the government said it was going after wasteful, inefficient—

● (1935)

Mr. James Moore: How do you cancel a volunteer initiative? It is just volunteer.

Mr. Charlie Angus: Mr. Chair, would the member be quiet while I ask the minister a question?

I want to know why the minister allowed a program to be cancelled, when the finance minister stood up and told Canadians that he was going after programs that were wasteful, inefficient, and out of touch with Canadians.

Yet, we find that the summative evaluation of the community participation program that was done under her ministry was buried. The Conservatives did not release it publicly because it contradicted everything that party said.

It said there was a program in place that implemented in a manner designed to increase the likelihood that Canadians would get full value for tax dollars spent. It said that the volunteer sector was under increasing and considerable stress. Yet, the only thing it could find in the summative evaluation for why this was cut was because it did not fit the government's priorities.

Why did the minister stand back and basically allow a fabrication to be put out that the volunteer sector organizations were wasteful and inefficient when her own reports contradicted that?

Hon. Bev Oda: Mr. Chair, that is not accurate. The summative evaluation was publicly released and stated that the volunteer program did not meet either the Government of Canada's or the departmental priorities.

This government is recognizing the contribution of our volunteers. They are the backbone of our communities and we are doing this across government. We support volunteer organizations like Big Brothers Big Sisters through Human Resources and Social Development Canada, Canadian Parents for French through official languages, the Victorian Order of Nurses through Health Canada, and the Red Cross through DFAIT. In fact, our priority is to support individuals, communities, and people who volunteer in their communities and neighbourhoods.

Mr. Charlie Angus: Mr. Chair, the heritage buildings tax incentive that was in place helped to rebuild Barrington Street and was used in Victoria at the Gooderham and Worts. It was a program that everyone across Canada said was an excellent program. Yet, it was cut.

What is the minister's explanation for cutting a program that was so valuable? Heritage communities across this country said it worked. It was a private sector initiative, and yet was another one that was wasteful and inefficient and out of touch?

Hon. Bev Oda: Mr. Chair, the member says that I should know my responsibilities, and I certainly do, but he should also know the responsibilities of the different ministers in this government.

That particular program comes under Parks Canada. At heritage there is the cultural spaces program which assists artistic and cultural organizations renovate, upgrade and improve their facilities.

Mr. Charlie Angus: Mr. Chair, I would like to ask her about cultural spaces. We had seen that it was at 14% nearing the end of the fiscal year. I talked to people in cultural space organizations across Canada who were saying that they have had program grants approved and nothing has flowed out of heritage. They waited and waited.

I would like to ask the minister, does she still review every single grant and send all the Quebec grants out for translation so she can decide personally to replace the role? Is that what is holding up the incredible gap between when these grants go in and when people actually get the money?

Hon. Bev Oda: Mr. Chair, unless the member has a camera in my office, he would not know.

The member is putting out false accusations, false allegations and misrepresentations. I read applications, I read the analysis, and I do it in French as well. How else would a minister recognize the improvements that can be made in every program to ensure there is reasonable distribution and that taxpayers' dollars are going to be used in a way that is going to help the organizations and the communities that are intended to be helped?

The Chair: Order, please. That 15 minute period is up and we will now move to a government round with, first, the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Works and Government Services and Minister for the Pacific Gateway and the Vancouver-Whistler Olympics.

[*Translation*]

Mr. James Moore (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Public Works and Government Services and Minister for the Pacific Gateway and the Vancouver-Whistler Olympics, CPC): Mr. Speaker, I am very pleased to come to the committee of the whole to discuss the Government of Canada's participation in the organization of the Vancouver-Whistler 2010 Winter Olympic and Paralympic Games.

As any athlete could confirm, the Olympics are the most important sports competition in the world and provide an opportunity for all participants to show their country and the rest of the world what they are made of.

For Canada, hosting the 2010 Winter Olympic Games is an excellent opportunity to celebrate and to show the whole world what distinguishes us as Canadians, namely, our diversity and our excellence in sports, athletics and culture.

[*English*]

This week the Vancouver organizing committee for the 2010 Winter Olympics and Paralympic Games, VANOC, publicly released in French and in English their business plan for the games operations.

I am pleased to report that we have reviewed it and congratulate VANOC for presenting a balanced budget. Having the plan available to the public enhances transparency and understanding of the challenges and opportunities presented by hosting the winter games.

VANOC commits that these games will be on time and on budget. VANOC's business oriented, no-nonsense approach to the Olympic Games planning is only the first of many Canadian legacies of the 2010 games.

The 2010 winter games will leave lasting economic, sport and social legacies for Canadians, not only in British Columbia, but also right across Canada.

The Government of Canada is working in close collaboration with our partners to ensure this happens. Through a comprehensive multi-party agreement signed in 2002 among key stakeholders of the 2010 winter games, the government has pledged essential support that we are convinced will make these the most successful winter games ever.

I recognize that this is a bold and ambitious goal, but look what we did in 1988. The Olympic experience in Calgary was a resounding success, especially notable for having left lasting legacies.

Today Calgarians and visitors to Calgary enjoy the Canada Olympic Park built by Calgary Olympic Development Association following the Olympics from a portion of its surplus. The association has also provided ongoing funding for Canadian Olympic athletes, which has made a lasting impact on Canadian sport.

The 1988 winter games left a significant social legacy as well. The games relied on an unprecedented number of volunteers and experience that they took back to share with their communities once the games were over.

To stage an equally successful Olympic and Paralympic effort in Vancouver and Whistler requires a high level of organization and a substantial financial commitment from the Government of Canada.

The multi-party agreement I spoke of a moment ago sets out the responsibilities of each of the stakeholders in a manner to meet their objectives of staging an inclusive 2010 winter games delivered on time and on budget that will showcase Canada's accomplishments and innovations to the world and create lasting legacies for Canadians.

Key Government of Canada priorities for the 2010 winter games are enshrined in the agreement. Three priorities in particular are: the promotion of Canada's two official languages, respect for the environmental sustainability, and active participation throughout the Olympic and Paralympic experience of Canada's aboriginal communities.

Mr. Chair, I will take a few minutes to address each of these objectives.

● (1940)

[*Translation*]

The Senate Committee on Official Languages examined the best ways of promoting Canada's linguistic duality in the context of the 2010 Winter Games.

In fact, the committee believes that the games provide an excellent opportunity to promote our linguistic duality. In its report, the committee made 10 recommendations. It suggested, among other things, providing funding to ensure participation of British Columbia's francophone organizations in the games and to allow equitable access to games programming for all Canadians.

The committee said it was encouraged by the commitment of the games' major partners toward the official languages. The Government of Canada shares this optimism. However, we cannot ignore the fact that we will face some challenges. We want to ensure that both of Canada's official languages are proudly represented at all stages of the 2010 Winter Games, from planning to full operations.

For its part, the Vancouver Organizing Committee for the 2010 Olympic and Paralympic Winter Games said it intended to go beyond its linguistic obligations as provided in the multiparty agreement and the Official Languages Act.

[*English*]

The Government of Canada is also committed to ensuring environmental sustainable practices throughout the 2010 winter games are used.

The Chair: Order, please. The Chair has had some indication that there was an intention to split the time, but there has been no indication on the part of the member, so before he reaches his five minutes, does he intend to share his time with anybody?

Mr. James Moore: No, Mr. Speaker. I will be using all of my time.

The Chair: Okay. I am sorry for interrupting the hon. member.

Mr. James Moore: As I was saying to the member for Vancouver Centre, the Olympics will also be using the most important environmentally sustainable practices throughout the games. To date, environmental assessments have been completed for all the major outdoor venues for the Games. This practice will continue as we move closer to 2010. Our goal is to work diligently with the Vancouver Organizing Committee to deliver a truly sustainable games experience.

With respect to aboriginal participation, the Government of Canada is committed to working collaboratively with first nations communities on the 2010 Winter Games, especially those who will be most affected by the events. For example, some of the Olympic events will be held on the shared lands of the Lil'wat, Musqueam, Squamish and Tsleil-Waututh First Nations.

● (1945)

[*Translation*]

We want to make sure that those communities are consulted at all steps, from the planning to the staging of the 2010 Winter Olympic Games. To that end, we gave funds to the Four Host First Nations Society to support its efforts with its partners in the 2010 Winter Olympic Games.

The mission of the society is to ensure that first nations culture and traditions are recognized, respected and promoted during the planning, the preparation and the staging of the games.

[*English*]

The Government of Canada has committed $552 million toward staging the best Winter Games ever. This includes $290 million in capital funding for sport and event venues and $130 million for essential services, such as security planning, emergency preparedness, immigration and customs services and meteorological services.

I want to call attention to an innovation that I find particularly interesting, which is our plan to build live sites in Vancouver and in Whistler. The government intends to invest $20 million in this enterprise. These sites are public spaces where those who do not have tickets to the events can gather to participate at no charge in the energy of the 2010 Winter Games. The sites will feature television coverage of competition, stage, entertainment, exhibits and display and pavilion spaces so that many more ticket holders themselves can be part of the festivities and feel the pride of being Canadian.

As for direct legacy benefits to Canadians, when the 2010 Winter Games are over, Vancouver and Whistler will have gained world-class facilities and a well trained army of volunteers. The athletes' villages in both cities are being designated to address the needs of the communities well into the future. The Vancouver athletes' village, for example, will be built on former industrial land and, following the 2010 Games, will be turned into a model sustainable community. Meanwhile, volunteers from across the country will return home after the 2010 Games with new skills and valuable experiences.

[*Translation*]

Some other advantages of hosting the 2010 Olympic and Paralympic Games are more difficult to measure but will nonetheless leave a lasting legacy. Energy and enthusiasm are an integral part of Olympic Games. The games will be an inspiration for many Canadians and will convince them to increase their sporting activities and improve their fitness.

[*English*]

Canadian artists will receive unprecedented exposure during the cultural Olympiad, leading up to the 2010 Winter Games, adding to Canada's already vibrant artistic landscape. The cultural inclusiveness associated with the games has already created new opportunities for first nations communities, youth, ethnic communities and the disabled.

Perhaps most important, the 2010 Winter Games will provide a rallying point for community and national pride, pride in one's country from an efficiently run Olympic effort, pride in the strength in the international reputation that will result from this cost effective experience, pride felt by artists and businesses for whom the Olympics will bring increased success. These will be the lasting legacies of the 2010 Winter Games and this government is a proud and committed supporter of this critical enterprise and great opportunity for Canada.

Mr. Chris Warkentin (Peace River, CPC): Mr. Chair, I would like to thank the hon. member for his thoughtful words on the upcoming Vancouver Olympics to be held in 2010. The Olympics is such an important event, it is an opportunity and what we choose to do with this opportunity speaks to the kind of nation that we are.

To host something of this magnitude requires foresight and vision in order to predict how best to deal with an opportunity like this. The environment can often be forgotten when planning an event of this proportion and it gives me great comfort to learn that the government is continuing to be a true leader on this front by incorporating environmental policy in the design of this event.

Could the hon. member take this moment to give us his thoughts on how important it is to ensure that the 2010 Olympics are an event that we can all be proud of?

Mr. James Moore: Mr. Chair, I could go on to reiterate my speech but perhaps the member for Vancouver Centre has some questions about the games as well so I will not take up all the time.

This is really an opportunity for Canada and I am pleased that all political parties, even the Bloc Québecois are in support. We know this is a great moment for Canada, for Quebec and for the host first nations when we have separatists telling members of Parliament from British Columbia how great a moment this will be for Canada and asking them how they can get in.

To give credit where credit is due, I know that when the Liberals were in government they did the things that were necessary to ensure the original steps, after the bid was successful, sent the right signals. They put together the right framework and infrastructure to ensure the games would be a success. We hope we have their continued support in doing everything that we need to do to ensure the games will be a success.

We have the Conservative government proudly on side. We have the Liberals, hopefully, completely on side. We even have the separatists , on side. Hopefully we can now get the New Democrats to come on side and recognize an opportunity when they see it.

● (1950)

Mr. Chris Warkentin: Mr. Chair, I am very excited about the upcoming Olympics because it will provide us with an opportunity to show ourselves to the rest of the world. This is a chance to put the personality of Canada in the forefront and celebrate what truly makes us Canadian.

This Olympics is a chance to show the world our linguistic duality and display and celebrate the culture of our first nations. We are unique in this world in that we have two official languages that flourish and act to define part of our personality as a nation. We are also very fortunate to be privileged by the culture of our first nations, a culture rich in tradition that we continually learn and benefit from.

Could the hon. member please take this moment to describe how Canada will express its personality to the world through its first nations and its official languages?

[*Translation*]

Mr. James Moore: Mr. Chair, those responsible for the Olympic Games will respect both official languages from the beginning to the end of the 2010 games. Our government has made that commitment. We had even made that decision when the Liberals were still in government.

[*English*]

The host first nations have been incredibly cooperative and proud and, in fact, very anxious to get the planning of the games and the building of the infrastructure underway.

It is a great moment in Canada, not only for the lasting legacies of the games but when we have such diverse political entities in this country working together on the games, the federal government, municipal governments, host first nations and, as I said, even separatists, to ensure the games will be a success, this is a moment Canada cannot miss and, with this Conservative government, we will not miss that moment.

Hon. Hedy Fry (Vancouver Centre, Lib.): Mr. Chair, I want to tell my dear kind friend that fine words like "pride in country" are not enough.

For the 2010 Olympics, this group says that it is committed to linguistic duality but the francophones in British Columbia are still waiting for the money promised them to run the francophone component of the games.

We also have the fact that we bid on the Olympic Games and won the bid based on a huge multicultural program and that program is still awaiting money. We only have three more years until the games and all of that should be in place but here is no money for it right now. How do we commit with no money?

Mr. James Moore: Mr. Chair, I do not agree. I have had countless meetings with Colin Hansen, the provincial minister responsible for the games, and with Premier Campbell and Carole Taylor, the provincial finance minister, and they have levelled no complaints. We have a great working relationship with John Furlong, who is the chair of the Olympic Games, the chair of VANOC. They are all very proud of the process that we have underway.

These games will be a success. They will be a success for the host first nations. Cultural communities have been engaged and they are involved. Youth have been engaged and they are involved. We are doing everything we can to ensure the games are a success.

The previous Liberal government had not put enough funding forward and Premier Campbell stepped forward and asked the federal government for an additional $55 million on the advice of John Furlong. This government, on top of the money that we had already committed, said that we would give them an additional $55 million above and beyond what was promised

These games will be a success and the member for Vancouver Centre will be proud.

Hon. Hedy Fry: Mr. Chair, those are fine words but, as of today, the money has not been forthcoming.

I just want to add that I will be splitting my time with the hon. member for Brampton West and the hon. member for Dartmouth—Cole Harbour.

However, let us talk about the games and excellence in the games.

The Liberals put their money where their mouth is. When we were in government we put $110 million into the "Own the Podium" and won the highest number of medals ever at the Turin Olympics.

The Conservative government promised $30 million for "Road to Excellence" to support high performance athletes but that money is not there and they cannot get ready for Beijing without that money. Where is the money?

Mr. James Moore: Mr. Chair, the money has been delivered but it is being delivered over a phase of time. John Furlong has not raised any of those concerns. These concerns perhaps are within the context of my colleague from Vancouver Centre.

All the plans that have been put in place by the government and, indeed, the ones that were originally put in place by the Liberals have been well received by VANOC, John Furlong, the premier, Sam Sullivan and all those involved in the games.

I do not know what concerns the member is raising. We know that everyone wants more money but the money we are delivering is more than enough to ensure these games will be a success. Frankly, this will be one of the most expensive games in the history—

● (1955)

The Chair: The hon. member for Vancouver Centre.

Hon. Hedy Fry: Mr. Chair, words are fine but a commitment to high performance athletes means that the government needs to put the money where its mouth is and that money is not there at this moment.

I have a question for the hon. minister for sports. Diabetes and obesity has put Canada in the shameful position of being one of the OECD countries with the highest level of childhood obesity and the risk of diabetes and heart disease.

The Liberal government put $140 million into community programs to increase the amount of physical activity for kids. However, the provinces have said that cannot work unless they have money for sports infrastructure so they have a place to play and a place to do sports.

This government had committed money to that. The provinces are now asking where the money is. In the 2006 and 2007 budgets there was no money for sports infrastructure.

Hon. Helena Guergis (Secretary of State (Foreign Affairs and International Trade) (Sport), CPC): Mr. Chair, the hon. member needs to know that I am not the Minister of Health so I cannot answer specific questions on the diabetes file. I also cannot answer questions on infrastructure because that is the Minister of Transport, Infrastructure and Communities.

However, with respect to infrastructure I know we made an announcement in the recent budget where we have increased infrastructure dollars to $33 billion, which is historic for the Government of Canada, and we have opened up the opportunity for smaller municipalities to look for infrastructure dollars for recreation centres.

The government has spent $140 million a year on sport, participation in sports and excellence in sports. Not only that, we have contributed $5 million more on the relaunch of an old program that the previous Liberal government trashed and destroyed, ParticipACTION, which is better than it has ever been.

Hon. Hedy Fry: Mr. Chair, I have one other question. In the budget and in the estimates there is a sunsetting of permanent programs that have been there for a long time. I would like to note that the athletes assistance program, which is a permanent program, will be sunsetting in 2011 and the aboriginal peoples program will be sunsetting in 2010. Does this mean that the government no longer has a commitment to those programs? Will it reinstate those programs in 2011 and 2010?

Hon. Helena Guergis: Mr. Chair, it is 2007 and, looking at our government's track record, I think the member is getting ahead of herself. We have made tremendous commitments to sport, including encouraging our youth to become more active in sport.

Let us talk about the announcement we just had the other day where we have a national soccer—

The Chair: Order, please. The hon. member for Brampton West.

Ms. Colleen Beaumier (Brampton West, Lib.): Mr. Chair, I want to know how much new funding the government has allocated for multiculturalism programs intended to promote intercultural understanding in 2006 to 2009.

Hon. Bev Oda (Minister of Canadian Heritage and Status of Women, CPC): Mr. Chair, let me assure the member that our commitment to multiculturalism and its programs will continue. They will be evaluated with due process, just as the sports programs will be evaluated to ensure we are getting—

Some hon. members: Hear, hear!

The Chair: Order, please. I am asking hon. members that when people on this side are answering the question, would you please listen to the answer. We do not want things to deteriorate any further than they already have. Things were going fine, let us keep them that way.

The hon. member for Brampton West.

Ms. Colleen Beaumier: Mr. Chair, just for the minister's information, her department's own financial summary indicates zero. Where is the departmental steering committee on multiculturalism, who is on it and what is its mandate?

Hon. Jason Kenney (Secretary of State (Multiculturalism and Canadian Identity), CPC): Mr. Chair, every ministry within the government, I understand, has a multiculturalism champion who is a senior official appointed to ensure that the department is acting in a manner consistent with both the spirit and the letter of the Canadian Multiculturalism Act.

In terms of the Department of Canadian Heritage, I and my secretary do not deal with the entire department. I simply deal with multiculturalism programs but I can tell the member that in every department we have such person who I think does a very adequate job.

● (2000)

Ms. Colleen Beaumier: Mr. Chair, please let me ask the minister for an answer one more time. The department's 2007-08 plans and priorities say that its mandate is to "mainstream multiculturalism into the day-to-day operations of the Department".

I will try this question. Canadian Heritage is planning to "mainstream multiculturalism". Once that happens, will the multiculturalism program exist as an independent program and receive funding directly, yes or no?

Hon. Jason Kenney: Mr. Chair, first of all, I am advised that Mr. Jacques Paquette is the multiculturalism champion in the Department of Canadian Heritage. He is an assistant deputy minister.

As the member knows or should know, the various programs which are administered with respect to multiculturalism have those moneys voted by Parliament. They are administered within the Department of Canadian Heritage. That will continue to be the case, as it always has been.

Ms. Colleen Beaumier: Mr. Chair, once again I did not get my question answered, and I do know who these people are.

I have to say that "mainstream" sounds to me like a euphemism for "eliminate". Does this minister not believe that Canada's multiculturalism program should receive federal funding on its own, yes or no?

Hon. Bev Oda: Mr. Chair, we are not as obsessed about the structure of government. We are obsessed with making sure that these communities and the policies are making Canada a strong country, an inclusive country recognizing its diversity. This diversity will benefit Canada. That is why we will ensure that whatever the programs are in multiculturalism, they are going to serve those communities and serve all Canadians very well going on into the future.

Ms. Colleen Beaumier: Mr. Chair, I would say that answer means no, so I see that the Reform and the Alliance policies live on.

Many NGOs that approached me in fear that they would not receive funding for anti-racism programs finally received their funding on March 28, two days before the end of the fiscal year. That is not much time in which to spend the money. Was that a deliberate attempt to cut back this programming?

Hon. Jason Kenney: No, Mr. Chair, I do not accept the premise of the question.

With respect to eliminating multiculturalism, I would perhaps ask my colleague to speak to her colleague, the member for Halton, who was quoted in the *Toronto Star* on February 9 as saying he also called for the elimination of the multiculturalism ministry.

As it relates to the anti-racism programming, we are continuing with the—

Ms. Colleen Beaumier: Mr. Chair, I rise on a point of order. I am asking the minister his positions. I am asking what he is about to do.

The Chair: That is not a point of order and the time has expired.

I would now turn to the hon. member for Dartmouth—Cole Harbour.

Mr. Michael Savage (Dartmouth—Cole Harbour, Lib.): Mr. Chair, I would like to talk with the minister about her expenses. Treasury Board guidelines indicate:

> Ministers are required to post on their respective departmental Web sites all travel expenses incurred on program-related business. All travel expenses must be posted on a quarterly basis within 30 days....

Did the minister file a disclosure statement for the first quarter of 2007?

Hon. Bev Oda: Mr. Chair, to the best of my knowledge we have followed all the rules and the necessary information has been posted.

Mr. Michael Savage: Mr. Chair, according to the website, the minister filed a disclosure statement for January 1 to March 1, which is two months, but not quite a quarter, which is three months.

In those two months, her speeches included speeches in Montreal, North York and Richmond Hill, but no expenses are filed. Did she walk to those places?

Hon. Bev Oda: Mr. Chair, I find it ironic that the member opposite is questioning this when there are no charges being placed upon the Canadian public. Because I have great supporters in my riding, they provided transportation for me to those events.

Mr. Michael Savage: Mr. Chair, that is an interesting answer. Let me ask her this. These are supposed to be quarterly reports, so that would include March. In March she went to the Junos in Saskatchewan. Did she get a drive with a supporter to the Junos too?

● (2005)

Hon. Bev Oda: Mr. Chair, the information will be posted as required. I find it interesting that the member opposite is questioning when we do not take the extent of the full quarter. We post the information as we find that we can make it available.

Mr. Michael Savage: Mr. Chair, I think the regulations say quarterly reports, but two months are reported and there are no expenses for the trips she made. The third month included a trip to Saskatchewan. Who took her there? The question is, if she did not pay for it, who are the friends who are taking her? That is a valid question.

I want to ask her a quick question about the Junos last year, when she racked up $5,500 in limo bills and reimbursed $2,200, leaving a net cost to the taxpayer of $3,500, while staying at a hotel that was one-tenth of a kilometre from the site of the Junos.

Did she ever think about walking? Halifax is a wonderful place to visit. Did she ever think about walking instead of taking limos and having stretch limos on standby, in some cases for six and seven hours at a time?

Hon. Bev Oda: Mr. Chair, the member opposite fails to mention the 10 other meetings that I had during my visit to Halifax. In fact, I have nothing to hide here.

The former minister, the minister for the Liberal Party, racked up in the same period of time over $100,000 more than I have racked up for transportation.

Mr. Michael Savage: Mr. Chair, if the minister has evidence of former ministers having stretch limos on standby from 4:30 p.m. to 11:30 p.m., I would like to know why that was. I would also like to ask her why it took two limos to get from the airport to Halifax.

Hon. Bev Oda: Mr. Chair, it was because I have family. I paid for those transportation costs personally with a personal cheque. I find it appalling that this member would question anybody's demonstration of affection for family members. I would also say that he does not understand. I fulfilled the requirements. I paid personally for those which were not related to my position.

Mr. Michael Savage: Mr. Chair, the problem is that one of those limos did not carry anybody. One of the limos was at the airport and was sent away because it was not good enough for the minister to travel in, so I ask her again: why did it take two limos to get from the airport to Halifax and why did she have to bill $5,500, of which she reimbursed only $2,200 to the taxpayers of Canada?

Hon. Bev Oda: Mr. Chair, this is an opportunity given to the House to have meaningful discussions on issues that are important to Canadians. I find that questioning limo costs, et cetera, is a terrible disservice to Canadians and is taking advantage of this opportunity.

That is the party that has not yet accounted for $40 million of taxpayers' dollars going directly to the Liberal—

The Chair: The hon. member for Dartmouth—Cole Harbour.

Mr. Michael Savage: Mr. Chair, the last question that I would ask is on the proactive disclosure. Last year she incurred the expense at the Junos on April 1. That expense was not put on the website until February of this year, after we raised it in the House of Commons. Will it take a year to find out about those expenses in January, February and March on the website too?

Hon. Bev Oda: Mr. Chair, my expenses are fully disclosed. My expenses are because I am doing a job, and I am doing a respectable and dedicated job in the position that I hold. It is important that we have a government that recognizes the importance of arts and culture, heritage and museums, and all of those sectors that I am responsible for.

I do it diligently and I do it with efficiency, but I know that my first job is to make sure that taxpayers' dollars are going to serve the people they are intended to serve in every sector, in every arts community, and that is why I will continue to do this job responsibly. I will ensure that the programs we create are going to help those in the arts, culture, museums—

The Chair: Order. We will now proceed to the next 15 minute round, the government round, with the Minister of International Cooperation and Minister for la Francophonie and Official Languages.

[*Translation*]

Hon. Josée Verner (Minister of International Cooperation and Minister for la Francophonie and Official Languages, CPC): Mr. Chair, dear colleagues, I am pleased to take part in this debate on the main estimates of the Department of Canadian Heritage for the 2007-08 fiscal year.

As my colleague, the Minister of Canadian Heritage and Status of Women, pointed out, the Department of Canadian Heritage plays an essential role in the cultural and community life of Canadians. I am proud to cooperate with her, and with all the other ministers, to promote the cultural vitality of Canadian society, particularly in the area of official languages. All of us here are well aware of the stakes involved in the promotion of official languages in Canada, and I am pleased to be here to discuss this issue.

Today, I would like to explain how we are taking firm and concrete action in the area of official languages. We get all partners and stakeholders involved. We listen to official language minority communities, and we invest new money to help promote our two official languages throughout the country.

Let me first explain my role as Minister for La Francophonie and Official Languages. I have two distinct responsibilities that complement each other. First, I am responsible for the Department of Canadian Heritage programs that support official languages. In that capacity, I ensure that the new Government of Canada helps promote official language minority communities, and the full recognition and use of both official languages.

I am also responsible for coordinating the activities of the new Government of Canada that relate to official languages. In that sense, my work takes me beyond the activities of the Department of Canadian Heritage, and involves cooperating with all my cabinet colleagues. I work with them to help official language minority communities, promote linguistic duality, support the linguistic rights of federal employees, and encourage the use of official languages in serving the public.

This double mandate in the area of official languages is in addition to my duties as Minister for la Francophonie. As hon. members know, it is the first time that all these responsibilities are grouped together under a single minister. This is concrete evidence that the new Government of Canada is living up to its commitments when it comes to official languages, and is strengthening the country's linguistic duality, both inside and outside the government.

From the beginning of our mandate, we have taken decisive and concrete action. Since my appointment, I have signed bilateral education agreements with every province and territory totalling $1 billion over four years. We have entered into important agreements for minority language services totalling $64 million over four years. For example, the Governments of Canada and British Columbia signed a multi-year agreement for French-language services. In addition, the Governments of Canada and Manitoba signed a multi-year agreement for minority language and second language education. Thanks to these agreements, minority communities are able to implement programs in keeping with their reality.

In addition to signing these agreements, I announced support for the construction and expansion of two school-community centres in New Brunswick, two centres in Saskatchewan and one centre in the Northwest Territories. I announced new funding for promising educational projects such as the École au coeur de la communauté project in New Brunswick. By providing better programs and services in French minority day cares, schools and universities, our goal is to allow young Canadians to start, continue and complete their studies in their language. In this way we will ensure that their community continues to thrive and that they live their lives in their language, in their region.

In addition, the Department of Canadian Heritage allocates $80 million annually to second-language learning programs, which makes it possible for 12,000 youths to participate in activities and work terms throughout the country. They benefit from experiences and gain knowledge enabling them to be versatile, mobile and in touch with today's reality. Canadian society as a whole shares in this success.

To get results such as these, we involve all partners and stakeholders in the process. Last October, I co-chaired the Ministerial Conference on the Canadian Francophonie. I can attest to the spirit of cooperation that was present in the various levels of government. We examined future courses of action and all ministers agreed on the report that was prepared.

● (2010)

I am convinced that, through this cooperation, our governments will be able to exercise their leadership on priority issues. I am thinking about issues such as the recruitment and retention of minority students or the revival of immersion programs and the development of innovative second language teaching methods.

In fact, I am very pleased, as a minister, as a francophone and as a Quebecker, that Quebec has become once again a full partner in our efforts concerning the francophonie. Quebec is the main centre of Canadian francophonie, and the support of Quebec partners is essential to ensuring that the French language flourishes across the country.

As I said earlier, I am working with my cabinet colleagues on francophonie and linguistic duality issues. Among other things, I announced, along with the former citizenship and immigration minister, a plan to promote the establishment of French-speaking immigrants in minority communities, and I will continue this work with the new Minister of Citizenship and Immigration. This is critical for the future of communities.

Finally, I attach considerable importance to the contribution of all francophones and francophiles who believe that linguistic duality is a major asset for all of Canada.

Canada's new government will continue to provide direct support to non-profit organizations that represent official language minority communities. I will continue to listen to their needs, their concerns, their ideas and their vision of the future.

When I was appointed to this portfolio, I conducted a series of consultations with representatives of official language communities and members of the second language education community. This enabled me to better understand the various realities that minority community members face and the opportunities available to them.

Our dialogue is ongoing. In two weeks, I will have an opportunity to meet a large number of representatives and stakeholders during the first summit of francophone and Acadian communities here in Ottawa. During the summit, we will have an opportunity to see where we are and find out how people responsible for the vitality of Canada's francophonie can make a difference.

We have a number of tools to achieve that goal. One of the most important tools is funding for official languages programs. In its latest budget, Canada's new government increased funding for linguistic duality and official language minority communities by $30 million for the next two years.

This kind of support makes promising projects, like the ones I mentioned, possible. Once again, this proves that Canada's new government is taking real action to ensure that Canadians can benefit fully from their two official languages.

Our linguistic duality makes Canada and Canadians richer. It is part of our cultural identity. It ensures economic success. It is a priceless, indispensable tool on the world stage. We have come to a point in our history where Canadians believe that bilingualism is becoming more important.

We are ready to take advantage of the vast potential of our linguistic duality both individually and collectively, and Canada's new government is planning to make a real difference in that regard.

It is our responsibility to focus on the enthusiasm of Canadian youth—indeed, of all Canadians—and to seize this unique opportunity to create a country that is proud of its two official languages and stronger because of them.

Our government is committed to official languages, and we have proven that many times over. We will continue to support official language minority communities.

● (2015)

Mr. Luc Harvey (Louis-Hébert, CPC): Mr. Chair, everyone knows that Canada's two official languages are sources of pride for this country. Canadians can be proud of living in a country where French and English coexist.

I would like to remind everyone that Canada's new government is committed to collaborating further with each provincial and territorial government and to holding constructive talks with official language minority communities in order to encourage and promote the use of French and English in Canadian society.

As proof, I will give the various agreements or accords with the provincial governments, as well as with a number of community organizations throughout the country since 2006.

Also, Canada's new government is counting on young people, among others, to further promote bilingualism here in Canada. Young Canadians, who are increasingly bilingual, will be able to make a difference and show that mastering both official languages is a major asset that enables them to participate fully in the economic and cultural development of this country.

Dialogue among cultures is important to Canada's new government, as evidenced by its strong support at the last Rendez-vous de la Francophonie. As we know, these meetings encourage the country's francophone minorities to develop and enable them to participate fully in all aspects of life in Canada.

Obviously Canada's new government completely supports the Official Languages Act, which shows our commitment to fully recognizing the country's linguistic duality.

I would like to know what the government will do to advance education in official languages, and how it is supporting minority communities.

● (2020)

Hon. Josée Verner: Mr. Chair, in fact, we have concluded agreements with all 13 provinces and territories. The agreements provide for federal investments of over $1 billion over four years. Of course, these agreements also generate provincial and territorial investments equal to or greater than our investment.

Both levels of government agreed on the following priority areas to address minority education challenges: French school promotion, student recruitment and retention, teaching resources development, distance training, and improved access to post-secondary education.

We also agreed to work together to improve second language teaching. More specifically, measures will be brought in to support relaunching immersion, to develop innovative teaching methods and to encourage second official-language learning at the post-secondary level.

Additionally, budget 2007 sets aside $15 million a year for the next two years for official language minority communities. This money will give these communities greater opportunities to live their lives in their mother tongue.

Targeted activities include supporting community centres, cultural and extracurricular activities, and other activities related to the promotion of linguistic duality, with a particular focus on youth.

The Deputy Chair: Before I give the floor to the hon. member for Laval, I would like to inform her that she will have 15 minutes. Does the hon. member intend to split her time?

Ms. Nicole Demers (Laval, BQ): Mr. Chair, I will be sharing my time with my colleague from Laurentides—Labelle.

In 2007, the women of Quebec and Canada have to continue fighting for their causes, but this government has done nothing but roll back the clock on women's equality. Already, with barely 14 female members elected, the Conservatives have set back parity in this House further than ever.

How can the minister turn her back on her own sex and embrace the outdated thinking of her party, whose sole aim is to silence the voices of those who have a different vision? Is it because the minister feels that the fight for equality between men and women is really over?

[*English*]

Hon. Bev Oda: Mr. Speaker, as you know, this government does not believe in a pink book. It does not believe in a women's caucus. We believe that we stand equally with all of our colleagues, male or female.

We have a contribution to make. We have the skills, we have the talent and we have the determination to play our role. We welcome any woman who will step forward and do public service as we have done.

The women's program is also supporting organizations that are increasing the participation of young women and women into the political life. We have a member who is actually starting an initiative right here in this caucus.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Johanne Deschamps (Laurentides—Labelle, BQ): Mr. Chair, this government has little regard for equality between men and women. The example of pay equity springs to mind, because the Conservative government is refusing to introduce proactive legislation comparable to what is in place in Quebec.

Does she, like the Bloc Québécois, recognize that Quebec's pay equity legislation is good legislation and a model for the federal government?

● (2025)

[*English*]

Hon. Bev Oda: Mr. Chair, we have a pay equity law. For over a decade the previous government did not ensure that the law was enforced. That is why we believe that reinforcing the existing law and then doing an assessment of that law are the proper steps to take. We want to make sure that legislation is implemented and enforced as well.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Nicole Demers: Mr. Chair, the Prime Minister promised to encourage more women to get involved in politics.

Does the minister feel that by eliminating rights groups' access to the women's program, she is helping more women take part in the important debates under way in Canada and Quebec?

[*English*]

Hon. Bev Oda: Mr. Chair, as I have said, this government does not just talk about rights but makes sure that we act on those rights. We make sure that we deliver those rights to women. The previous government did nothing about matrimonial property rights for aboriginal women. Women's rights under the charter were not implemented for aboriginal women. Women's rights are going to be always—

[*Translation*]

The Deputy Chair: The hon. member for Laurentides—Labelle.

Ms. Johanne Deschamps: Mr. Chair, with regard to the court challenges program, although the Prime Minister said this afternoon that he preferred providing people with direct assistance to hiring lawyers, how can the minister justify that federal agencies like Canada Post have been fighting in court for years, at taxpayers' expense, to evade their pay equity obligations?

[*English*]

Hon. Bev Oda: Mr. Chair, first of all, the court challenges program is before the court, so it is inappropriate for me to comment.

This government has a responsibility to make sure that the legislation we put forward for consideration in this House respects everyone's rights equally and that women are considered in the development of the programs in that legislation. We are acting on enforcing and implementing good legislation that is going to give opportunities to both men and women.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Nicole Demers: Mr. Chair, if the minister feels that women's rights groups are playing an important role and taking real action, what does she plan to do to support them properly?

[*English*]

Hon. Bev Oda: Mr. Chair, as I have indicated, we listen to all of our constituents, men and women. It is our job to make sure that whatever policies and legislation we put forward address the needs of Canadian men and women.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Johanne Deschamps: Mr. Chair, the Conservatives take great pride in having increased the women's program budget. But the fact is that they did so by reducing women's access to Status of Women Canada offices and reducing direct assistance in the regions by closing 12 regional offices, including the office in Quebec City.

In light of your decision to slash $5 million in administrative funding for Status of Women Canada, how can closing 12 Status of Women Canada offices help women raise awareness of the reality in their community?

Do you really believe that the central offices will know enough about what is going on in the different regions of the country to take appropriate actions to help women?

The Deputy Chair: The hon. member for Laurentides—Labelle should know that when she addresses the minister, she should refer to her in the third person and not in the second person.

[*English*]

Hon. Bev Oda: Mr. Chair, as I have said before, this government wants to ensure that we are giving direct help to women. This government does not maintain offices for the sake of maintaining offices. We do not maintain expenses in administration. We try to find efficiencies in streamlining. We have found those.

We are delivering more programs to women in their communities that are going to directly make a difference in their daily lives. These are women who live in poverty. These are single parents. These are women trying to get ahead in the workforce. These are senior women who are finding themselves with low income and at the poverty level.

These challenges had been going on for many years under the previous government and we are doing something about them.

● (2030)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Nicole Demers: Mr. Chair, the closure of the offices of Status of Women Canada and the layoff of 68 public servants is worrisome for immigrant women's groups because her managers could, in certain cases, convey the interests of immigrant women to other departments.

How will this work be done now that it is no longer possible to have direct contact with these groups in their communities?

[*English*]

Hon. Bev Oda: Mr. Chair, I have two things. When I meet the women who are going to benefit from the programs and proposals put forward, they thank us and say it will make a difference in their lives and the lives of their children. I experienced that just this past weekend in Saint John, New Brunswick.

We do not leave it to just one entity or agency of government. When we discuss any policy, program or legislation as a caucus or cabinet, we are always asking the question about how—

The Deputy Chair: The hon. member for Laurentides—Labelle.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Johanne Deschamps: Mr. Chair, I will be brief.

I would like to know the minister's priorities for next year with regard to the status of women.

[*English*]

Hon. Bev Oda: Mr. Chair, I am very pleased to say that we have established two programs: the women's community fund and the women's partnership fund. These programs will be fully up and implemented as soon as possible. We also have an additional $5 million in this year's budget that will go toward helping women in the next year.

[*Translation*]

The Deputy Chair: The hon. member for Laurentides—Labelle has asked a short question that required a long answer.

Ms. Nicole Demers: That is not our problem.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. member for Laval.

Ms. Nicole Demers: Mr. Chair, I cannot believe these answers. I am very angry and offended. It is shameful.

For months, witnesses have been appearing before the Standing Committee on the Status of Women. These witnesses have told us how angry they are with the cuts to programs and subsidies as well as changes in programs. This evening, we are told that, since one group is happy, everything is all for the best in the best of all worlds. It is about time that the minister take her head out of the sand and start looking at real people. It is not just about Real Women, it is about real people. She should get her head out of the sand. Just because she is the Minister of Canadian Heritage and Status of Women does not mean that she has all the answers.

I would like to know if the minister intends to ask her government to change the live-in caregiver program because these individuals are living in abominable conditions and cannot take it any more. The last time she was questioned about this her answers did not make any sense. Does she intend to change the program?

[*English*]

Hon. Bev Oda: Mr. Chair, we have put forward programs that say that community organizations that work with women and know of the needs of women in their communities are free to come forward to make proposals to the Status of Women. We have now increased by $10 million the money that will be available to those organizations.

I too have spoken to the associations that are no longer being funded to advocate and lobby government, but this is working directly for women in the communities. We are working with the organizations that for years have been working diligently every day to help women in their communities.

I have been to Edmonton and Toronto, and talked to women who are now benefiting from our new women's community program. This program is able to enhance the job being done for women in their neighbourhoods.

[*Translation*]

Ms. Johanne Deschamps: Mr. Speaker, the employment insurance issue is very important to me. This deals a direct blow to women in my riding, across Quebec and also in Canada.

Part-time work, seasonal work, casual work, home-based work, all these are the reality facing women every day. And the EI fund—in which the government does not invest one cent, but from which it takes surpluses of billion of dollars—does not deal with this reality at all.

Knowing that the system discriminates against women, will the minister dare to show some courage with her fellow ministers and ask them to give a royal recommendation to Bill C-269?

[*English*]

Hon. Bev Oda: Mr. Chair, as a member of cabinet I know of the discussions that are happening regarding employment insurance and that the Minister of Human Resources and Social Development has been working diligently to make sure that program is going to benefit all part time workers in Canada. We realize the situation they are in. That program needs to be enhanced and we are working to make sure it is going to be helpful and applicable to all members of Canadian society.

● (2035)

[*Translation*]

Ms. Nicole Demers: Mr. Speaker, aboriginal women in Quebec lament the lack of core funding for shelters for aboriginal women. The Conservative government continues to hold the funding of these shelters at approximately 30% of the average grants for Quebec's shelters.

Does the minister plan to make up this difference of almost $337,000 compared to other shelters in Quebec and ensure recurrent funding, or does she prefer to lower the standards by giving us the example of funding in other provinces?

[*English*]

Hon. Bev Oda: Mr. Chairman, I am very proud to work with our Minister of Indian Affairs because he has come forward and ensured that these women living on reserves will now have matrimonial property rights.

He has also increased the funding for on reserve family violence shelters by $6 million. I know that our Minister of Human Resources and Social Development has increased family employment and settlement housing needs. We are working with not just one agency so that every other minister is relieved of his or her responsibility to women in Canada but we work together as a team.

[*Translation*]

The Deputy Chair: The hon. member for Laurentides—Labelle should know that there is one minute and a half for both the question and the answer.

Ms. Johanne Deschamps: Mr. Chair, if women have truly achieved equality, as the Conservative government suggests, the minister needs to know that twice as many women as men continue to live in poverty.

Does the minister realize that young women have to give up plans to save for retirement because they are juggling career and family responsibilities?

Does the minister believe that Quebec's low-cost child care system provides direct assistance to women and that it is much more efficient than her government's $100 per month taxable allowance?

[*English*]

Hon. Bev Oda: Mr. Chair, the child care benefit helps women for every child under the age of six regardless of income.

As I indicated, this is a government that acts. Each minister has a responsibility. Let me just point out that for 10 years under the previous government, all we did was see Canada get on a watch list for human trafficking, be noted and listed as not doing enough for women regarding violence, particularly aboriginal violence. We know we are on those lists. Our job is to get Canada off of those lists and to do something for women.

Hon. Jason Kenney (Secretary of State (Multiculturalism and Canadian Identity), CPC): Mr. Chair, I am pleased to rise to address the committee of the whole as it considers the main estimates for the multiculturalism program in the Department of Canadian Heritage for the fiscal year ending March 31, 2008.

Canadians of all backgrounds make vital contributions to the development of our economy, to our cultural landscape, and to building a welcoming and respectful cohesive society. Our Conservative government is committed to genuinely listening, engaging, and delivering results on behalf of new Canadians and of cultural communities.

As the Prime Minister said last year on Multiculturalism Day, June 27:

> In the 21st century, millions of people around the world still view Canada as a land of opportunity — a country in which where you're going matters more than where you come from. And every year, our country benefits from the arrival of thousands of men and women drawn by the equality of opportunity that exits here.

As Secretary of State for Multiculturalism and Canadian Identity, I view my work as, in part, that of an ambassador establishing links between the Government of Canada and our country's cultural communities.

Since being named secretary of state four months ago, I have had the pleasure of attending more than 100 meetings, events and celebrations with dozens of communities and organizations across the country. Indeed, in the preceding year as Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister I attended dozens more.

From these events and meetings in community centres, churches, temples, synagogues, mosques and private homes across the country, I have heard about challenges that face newcomers to Canada and the priorities of members of our many cultural communities.

My consultations have clearly established for me the following priority issues for new Canadians and cultural communities. The first is the issue of economic integration and the need to ensure that new Canadians can practise in the profession of their choice and have their qualifications recognized, and to enter into the circle of prosperity here in Canada.

Second, I hear from new Canadians and members of cultural communities a desire not to be separated off into cultural ghettos but a desire for full and total equality of opportunity in Canadian society.

Third, there is the desire for education so that all Canadians, including newcomers who we welcome every year, nearly a quarter of a million, learn about our history, values, institutions and symbols.

Fourth, combating the ongoing reality of racism in Canadian society is also a priority, as is fostering inter-community and interfaith understanding and dialogue to ensure that we build national cohesion in this pluralistic society.

Fifth, to engage young people in particular through meaningful and practical programs that deliver results, like mentorships that can help bridge gaps between communities and the mainstream, and between different cultural communities themselves.

The sixth and final priority is a desire to see a multiculturalism articulated that, while celebrating our differences, leads, as I say, not to ghettoization but to national cohesion.

Our government embraces the tremendous diversity of our country and this evening I want to speak about what we have done to reinforce Canada's model of pluralism in order to strengthen social cohesion.

[*Translation*]

The principles of multiculturalism are entrenched in Canadian law. In 1988, Prime Minister Mulroney introduced the Canadian Multiculturalism Act. It was the first act of its kind in the world.

We are pursuing the efforts undertaken by Prime Minister Mulroney to build a society that supports community participation as well as individual contributions and respect for all.

In light of what brings us here tonight, I would like to outline the work the new Government of Canada is doing, through the Department of Canadian Heritage's multiculturalism program, to strengthen pluralism in Canada.

The government supports measures that work, that is measures that help ethnocultural communities respond to the challenges they face.

With the multiculturalism program, the new Government of Canada funds projects recognizing the value of our diversity and addressing issues facing cultural communities.

● (2040)

[*English*]

For example, there is the issue and challenge of foreign credential recognition. Labour market access is a crucial factor in integrating ethnocultural communities. Our government recognizes that people with foreign credentials too often encounter closed doors. We are committed to doing everything we can to help open those doors to those who face barriers. That is why we are funding projects to support professionals so they can take action to address labour market access issues. This will allow new Canadians the ability to begin the qualification process and to search for employment that uses their talents, their skills and their experience.

Another project I am very proud our government has launched is the participation in the Aga Khan's Global Centre for Pluralism. Canada has much to share with other countries in terms of diversity. I am very pleased that Canada has been selected as the site for the Global Centre for Pluralism. I believe this illustrates the regard in which Canada is held as a society that embraces pluralism.

Our government is providing $30 million for this centre, which is a partnership between the Aga Khan Foundation and Canada's government. This international institution will serve as a cornerstone of peace, stability and human development in the 21st century.

I am also proud of our government's work with respect to redress of historic injustices, immigration restrictions and wartime internment measures, in particular, this government's historic work to redress the historic injustice of the Chinese head tax and the exclusion act.

In the April 2006 Speech from the Throne, Canada's new government made a commitment to apologize for the Chinese head tax. On June 22 of last year, as we know, the Prime Minister offered a full apology to Chinese Canadians in this chamber for the head tax, while he expressed deep sorrow for the subsequent exclusion of Chinese immigrants. Let me note that we marked in ministerial statements here on Monday the 60th anniversary of the repeal of the Chinese immigration act which effectively banned the Chinese from entering Canada.

To give substantial meaning to this apology, at the end of August 2006 we announced that surviving head tax payers could apply for ex gratia symbolic payments of $20,000. On December 1, 2006 the Minister of Canadian Heritage announced that persons who had been in conjugal relationships with head tax payers who were now deceased could apply for similar ex gratia payments. I am pleased to announce that as of May 11, 163 symbolic payments have been made to the head tax payer generation as a real and tangible sign of redress on the part of the Government of Canada.

Related to that of course, and I notice that I am getting heckled from the opposition, when the Liberal Party was in government for 13 years, it refused an apology for the Chinese head tax, refused redress, refused to even consult the community meaningfully on these issues. When it came time for the Prime Minister to stand up and make this historic apology in this House, half the Liberal caucus was absent from this place, including the Liberal Party's leader. I know members of the Chinese community wonder why the Liberal Party has expressed no regret for its total irresponsibility on that issue.

Let me say that we continue the issue of redress as it relates to the community historic recognition program and the national historic recognition program. As part of our government's commitment to this, we have committed $24 million to be disbursed through the CHRP, as well as another $10 million for the NHRP. These programs will contribute to strengthening the sense of inclusion of all communities in Canada and will highlight the contribution of these communities in building our country. We are not only delivering on this very important promise, but we as a nation are taking one more step in correcting past hardships.

Another initiative that I am particularly interested to be involved with is the cross-cultural round table on security. In a time of heightened concern about security, the government understands that measures should be designed to help foster social cohesion and national identity and recognize that ethnocultural communities share with all Canadians a desire to promote national and community security.

The cross-cultural round table provides insights on national security measures that may impact Canada's diverse communities. It promotes frank dialogue in the protection of civil order, mutual respect for all Canadians and common understanding.

The Department of Canadian Heritage worked with the Ministry of Public Safety in setting up the cross-cultural round table. I give due credit to the previous government in this initiative, and we continue to participate in setting its priorities and strategic direction.

● (2045)

[*Translation*]

Finally, I would like to touch on Canada's action plan against racism. This is a government-wide effort to combat racism and remove barriers to the full participation of every Canadian to our society.

Canadian Heritage, in cooperation with the Department of Citizenship and Immigration, the Department of Human Resources and Skills Development, and the Department of Justice, has launched eight new programs, with a budget of—

[*English*]

The Deputy Chair: The hon. member for Fleetwood—Port Kells.

Mrs. Nina Grewal (Fleetwood—Port Kells, CPC): Mr. Chair, I would like to thank the hon. Secretary of State for Multiculturalism and Canadian Identity for his insights into the multiculturalism program, as well as for outlining how Canada's new government is addressing the needs of new Canadians and ethnocultural communities.

I was interested to hear the Secretary of State mention that he has been consulting with the cultural communities to get a better understanding on how relevant the government program is to our everyday lives.

Would the hon. Secretary of State give us an idea of how many meetings and events he has attended since being appointed Secretary of State four months ago?

Hon. Jason Kenney: Mr. Chair, as I indicated before, I see a large part of my function as acting as a sort of ambassador with the cultural communities on behalf of the government to ensure that we have our ear to the ground, that we are listening to the preoccupations and priorities of the communities. That is why virtually every weekend I have been travelling especially to the larger cities where there are large concentrations of new Canadians. I have attended, I gather at the latest count, over 100 events with cultural communities to represent the government and to listen. I am proud of that work.

Let me give one example. On one weekend in February I attended events with the Armenian community in Toronto, the Hungarian community in Montreal. I was with the Jewish, Sudanese, Hindu and Sikh communities in Winnipeg. This was all on one three day weekend.

I attended a meeting on immigration policy with the Sikh community in Toronto, with the Somali community in Toronto and attended a Ukrainian social service organization dinner to bring greetings.

I attended a meeting of Sikh farmers in Abbotsford and finally attended the 20,000 person gala celebration of the great social service organization called S.U.C.C.E.S.S., founded by the Chinese Canadian community in Vancouver.

When I meet the people from all of these communities, I feel tremendous pride as a Canadian.

● (2050)

Mrs. Nina Grewal: Mr. Chair, I would like to congratulate the hon. Secretary of State for Multiculturalism and Canadian Identity and the Minister of Canadian Heritage and Status of Women for delivering redress for the historic injustice of the Chinese head tax. In just one year Canada's new government accomplished what the party opposite could not even get done in 13 years.

I would also like to commend the Secretary of State for placing emphasis on the 60th anniversary of the repeal of the exclusion act and the 50th anniversary of the election of Douglas Jung, the first Canadian of Chinese descent to be elected to Parliament.

As we celebrate Asian Heritage Month, would the Secretary of State report to the committee of the whole where the Government of Canada stands with ex gratia payments to victims of the head tax and their conjugal spouses?

Hon. Jason Kenney: Yes, Mr. Chair, and let me acknowledge the member for Fleetwood—Port Kells for her involvement in many of these issues and her strong voice for new Canadians in particular in the government caucus.

As I mentioned, we have processed some 163 ex gratia payments. We have received several hundred more. We are in the final stages of approving the details of the community historic recognition program and the national historic recognition program.

I would like to remind the House, as I did just a moment ago, that these measures that occurred between 1885 and 1947, the head tax and exclusion act that was introduced by the government of Mackenzie King, made many Chinese Canadians feel that they were not full participating members of our society. Many of them came to call Dominion Day, Canada Day, humiliation day.

All of that ended in the House last June 22 with the full and final apology on behalf of the Government of Canada offered by the Prime Minister, who had the courage to do the right thing after 13 years of inaction from our predecessors.

I, to this day, would like to know why the current Leader of the Opposition and half of his caucus did not think that apology, that historic moment in the history of this Parliament, demanded their presence to show respect to the Chinese Canadian community. Can they explain why they chose absence over participating in that historic apology?

[*Translation*]

The Deputy Chair: Before giving the floor to the hon. member for Lac-Saint-Louis, I would like to know whether he intends to share his time. I intend to give him 15 minutes.

Mr. Francis Scarpaleggia (Lac-Saint-Louis, Lib.): Mr. Chair, I intend to share my time with the hon. member for Winnipeg South Centre and the hon. member for Fredericton.

[*English*]

On February 27 last, the House of Commons adopted a motion by a vote of 159 to 123 calling on the government to give national status to Exporail, a rail museum on the south shore of Montreal. This was somewhat of a historic moment in this House because it was the first time in Canadian history that the House of Commons had adopted a motion in support of a specifically named museum.

At the time, the parliamentary secretary in arguing against the adoption of this motion, said that museums policy could not be made on the fly, that there could not be an ad hoc approach to museums policy. To that date no museum outside of Ottawa had been granted national status and funding on an annual basis.

A few short weeks later the Prime Minister decided to make museums policy on the fly and on an ad hoc basis by announcing the Canadian human rights museum project in Winnipeg. Of course the foundation for that project was laid by the previous Liberal government. I would add that the Conservative government did not have the common decency to invite the Liberal members of Parliament from the Winnipeg area to that ceremony, despite all the work that the previous Liberal government had done on the file.

I would like to know a couple of things from the minister. In this House about two weeks ago a member from the Bloc Québécois asked the minister how far along she was in analyzing the request by the Exporail representatives to grant the museum national museum status. The minister said that she was looking into the matter. How far along is she in analyzing the issue?

In a letter that I wrote to the minister on March 9 as the advocate for Exporail, I suggested that she and I and representatives of Exporail and the Canadian Railway Historical Association meet to discuss the issue further.

I would like answers to two questions. How far along is the department in looking at this request? When will we be meeting to discuss it?

I would like to make one more point about the Exporail museum. As the minister knows, museums in Canada receive part of their revenues from gate receipts. The average is about 33% of total museum revenues come from gate receipts. Exporail receives 45% of its revenues from gate receipts. I think it is a great candidate for national museum status and funding on an annual basis, especially since the House of Commons in a vote of 159 to 123 affirmed its support for Exporail.

● (2055)

The Deputy Chair: The Minister of Canadian Heritage should know that the hon. member for Lac-Saint-Louis has allowed her one minute and 20 seconds to respond to the question.

Hon. Bev Oda: Mr. Chair, the member's question gives me an opportunity to ensure that we are looking at the Exporail request. The Exporail request actually is for operating funds. As we have clearly stated, we do not cover the operating funds for non-federal museums. We have now looked at that. We have to ensure that there is consistency and that we have a uniform approach for all organizations.

On the human rights museum we have come to an agreement, with very strong community support in the city of Winnipeg, from the private sector, the foundation, the city, the province. They have all contributed and have agreed that the human rights museum will become a federal museum. Therefore, we will be providing the necessary operating funds. This is consistent with the approach and the policies of the Department of Canadian Heritage which have been in place for a number of years. We do not have an ad hoc approach to museums.

I would say to the member that I would be pleased, I know the request is in my scheduling office and will be—

The Deputy Chair: The next block of time, five minutes, belongs to the hon. member for Winnipeg South Centre.

Hon. Anita Neville (Winnipeg South Centre, Lib.): Mr. Chair, at a press conference in February, the minister spoke glowingly about friendship centres. The National Association of Friendship Centres was optimistic that long term funding and enhancement would be forthcoming. Then the budget was tabled. There were no enhancements. Where did the budget process fail? Why did the government not invest in friendship centres? Is it not one of its priorities?

Hon. Bev Oda: Mr. Chair, I am very proud of what our government has done regarding friendship centres. There are 116 friendship centres across Canada and they serve urban aboriginal people.

I have witnessed, by visiting friendship centres, the good service they provide to the community. I also point out that this government has increased the funding to friendship centres over the two years in our budgets by $2.2 million more than the previous government.

Hon. Anita Neville: Mr. Chair, the Assembly of First Nations is in the midst of completing a business plan for the national first nations language strategy. Will the minister pledge to the House that once this language strategy is complete, there will be resources within the fiscal framework to ensure that first nations will immediately receive the resources necessary to implement the strategy?

● (2100)

Hon. Bev Oda: Mr. Chair, again, the business plan is coming as a result of a meeting that I head with the leadership of the aboriginal communities.

The previous government was going to go forward with a proposal on which the aboriginal community was not in unanimous agreement. That is not listening to the needs of the community.

Hon. Anita Neville: Mr. Chair, at a recent Status of Women committee meeting, Ellen Gabriel, president of the Quebec Native Women's Association said:

> The value of aboriginal women in our society today has diminished to where, as Amnesty International has stated, we have become a commodity in society in general.

Aboriginal women have told members on this side that they have felt used by the Minister of Indian Affairs and that the implementation of Bill C-44 as is and as presented will create more problems for them.

Why has the minister not spoken up on behalf of the status of aboriginal women to her colleagues?

Hon. Bev Oda: Mr. Chair, I find it ironic that while her government and her party was in government she sat by and did nothing. We have seen aboriginal women be the victims of violence in Canada. It is appalling that we are on the list and have been denoted as not doing enough.

We are acting. We are committed and support Sisters in Spirit on an ongoing basis with funding. We also have instituted legislation which will protect aboriginal women and ensure they are safety in their communities.

Hon. Anita Neville: Mr. Chair, has an analysis has been done on the potential accessibility or the lack thereof of the change in program delivery of the status of women?

Hon. Bev Oda: Mr. Chair, as I have pointed out, we have put into place two programs: the community program and the partnership program. We have identified where the needs are.

When we came into office, we were told the two challenges facing women, the greatest challenge being violence—

The Deputy Chair: The hon. member for Winnipeg South Centre.

Hon. Anita Neville: Mr. Chair, another Conservative member of the status of women committee indicated that single senior women were "hung out to dry" in the budget. Does the minister agree and, if so, why did she not speak up on their behalf?

Hon. Bev Oda: Mr. Chair, we inherited a problem. It just did not start this year. We are supporting the women in their communities. We are providing programs that will enhance their skills training, their financial management abilities, their ability to get out there and —

The Deputy Chair: The hon. member for Winnipeg South Centre should know there are 40 seconds left for both the question and the answer.

Hon. Anita Neville: Mr. Chair, there is indeed a one time grant for shelters for women on reserve. Why is it only a one time grant and how much money has been allocated to date?

Hon. Bev Oda: Mr. Chair, the Minister of Indian Affairs is committed to the aboriginal peoples. He is putting in programs that are meaningful and are going to really make a change.

We just do not talk; we act. I can assure members that the needs of the aboriginal communities will be met.

Hon. Andy Scott (Fredericton, Lib.): Mr. Chair, my first question will be for theminister responsible for official languages. In her opening statement earlier, she mentioned the opening of two official language community centres in Saint John and Fredericton, New Brunswick.

Would the minister acknowledge that those two facilities were in fact the result of the official languages action plan of 2003?

[*Translation*]

Hon. Josée Verner: Mr. Chair—

An hon. member: Oh, oh!

Hon. Josée Verner: If the hon. member for Bourassa wants to answer for me, he is free to do so, since they are not very far from one another.

It was a great pleasure for me to go to New Brunswick at the beginning of my term to make announcements to two school-community centres—announcements that were highly anticipated. I went back in early April when additional funding was announced. We will stay attuned to their needs.

● (2105)

[*English*]

Hon. Andy Scott: Mr. Chair, the parliamentary secretary responsible for the Olympics acknowledged the work that was done in preparation for the Olympics. The minister of multiculturalism showed the same graciousness. In fact, construction began even before the election.

Would the minister not acknowledge that was the direct result of the 2003 action plan that the Prime Minister denied this afternoon in question period?

[*Translation*]

Hon. Josée Verner: Mr. Speaker, last year, at the beginning of the term, together with Bernard Lord, I had the pleasure of attending a sod turning ceremony to announce plans in New Brunswick.

If the hon. member thinks this was a building that was already there under his government, I can assure him that I had a shovel in my hands.

[*English*]

Hon. Andy Scott: Mr. Chair, it is not a matter of how I feel about it. It is a reality. The hole was in the ground. The building was being built. I think the minister could show the same graciousness as her colleagues, the minister of multiculturalism and theparliamentary secretary responsible for the Vancouver Olympics.

I have a question for the Minister of Heritage. Does the Minister of Heritage realize that all the good being done by her apprenticeship program for museums is being undone by the fact that all students who were going to work in the museums this summer are not going to have their jobs because of cuts that were made by her colleague minister, the Minister of Human Resources and Social Development?

Hon. Bev Oda: Mr. Chair, the reality is quite the opposite. In this budget we have enhanced the support for student apprenticeships in museums by $5 million. We are addressing a pent up demand that was left to grow by the previous Liberal government. That is why this sum will now be available to support student work in museums in every community across Canada. I know how valuable that work is to the museums and to the students.

Hon. Andy Scott: Mr. Chair, the reality is that while the minister is announcing new money for museums for students for the summer, her other minister is announcing that they will be cancelled.

Would the minister guarantee, in her new program, that all the kids who will not be working in my riding this summer will get the jobs that she has talked about tonight?

Mr. Jim Abbott: Mr. Chair, I rise on a point of order. I know these proceedings are new to some of us, although my friend and I have been in the House a fair length of time. He might want to reflect on the fact that his questions really should be directed at the minister to do with her estimates, not the broad questions that he has been putting.

Hon. Andy Scott: Mr. Chair, my question was for the minister about her program that she spoke of in her announcement. I simply asked the question whether it would undo the damage that the other minister did.

Hon. Bev Oda: Mr. Chair, as I indicated, there is an enhancement to the assistance given to museums for student work. The program that was introduced by the Minister of Human Resources is to redirect the money that is necessary, not to advantage Liberal held ridings but to show that the work can be done where there is low employment and that employment will be given to those students with the greatest need.

Hon. Andy Scott: Mr. Chair, she is supposed to be an advocate for in the museums in my constituency. She has just insulted them by suggesting they do not deserve the students—

The Deputy Chair: The Minister of Canadian Heritage.

Hon. Bev Oda: Mr. Chair, as I say, we have enhanced the support available to museums. We will respond to every application and give them due process and ensure museums are helped as much as possible.

Hon. Helena Guergis (Secretary of State (Foreign Affairs and International Trade) (Sport), CPC): Mr. Chair, I am pleased to speak to the committee of the whole as Secretary of State for Sport on behalf of Canada's new government.

I would like to begin by discussing the government's commitment to strengthening Canadian sport for the benefit of all Canadians and how we are building on these successes.

The government's involvement in sport is directed by the Physical Activity and Sport Act and is informed by the Canadian sport policy, which has been endorsed by the federal government as well as all provincial and territorial governments.

The government is committed to establishing Canada as a leading sport nation at home and abroad, where all Canadians and their communities can enjoy the benefits of active participation and excellence in sport.

Canada's new government understands the importance of supporting sport at all levels from the grassroots to the Olympic and Paralympic excellence. The government is the single largest investor in Canadian sport, with more than $140 million a years.

The foundation of our success is a planned and strategic approach to strengthening sport in Canada. We have developed and implemented a long term athlete development model called "Canadian Sport for Life", which delivers an integrated framework to further coordination and collaboration between governments and organizations working in sport. We have also renewed the federal-provincial-territorial priorities for collaborative action through to 2012.

Through these policies aimed at improving partnerships, Canada is well poised to build on its success for an even stronger, more successful sport system in the future.

I will say a few words about our four major pillars of the Canadian sport policy.

First is participation. More and more Canadians are getting involved in quality sport activities at all levels and through all forms of participation. The long term result of this participation will be healthier lifestyles and an improved quality of life for everyone. Over the last year and a half Canada's new government has significantly increased the amount of opportunities for Canadians to participate in sport.

For example, the children's fitness tax credit has been in effect since January 1. This allows parents to claim a tax credit of up to $500 of eligible expenses related to sport and physical activity programs for their children under the age of 16. This helps promote physical fitness and sports among our children and youth which is critical to the present and future health of our society.

Also we have relaunched the award winning ParticipACTION program with a contribution of $5 million over two years. ParticipACTION is partnering with media, business, labour, education, volunteer organizations and physical activity and sport groups to support the efforts of national, provincial and territorial governments to strongly encourage a more active and healthy Canada.

We have also collaborated with the Canadian Fitness and Lifestyle Research Institute to improve understanding of sport and physical activity trends in Canada. The findings that result from this collaboration will help inform our future policy decisions in sport and make Canada a globally recognized leader in physical activity and healthy well-being.

Finally, we have implemented two new policy guidelines, the policies on sport for persons with a disability and the aboriginal people's participation in sport. These two initiatives provide frameworks to improve equity and access to quality sport opportunities for these two under represented groups in Canadian sport.

Our second pillar and major goal in Canadian sport policy is excellence. It is clear we have an expanding pool of talent in Canadian athletes who are achieving great results on the world stage. As we look forward to hosting the 2010 Olympic and Paralympic Winter Games in Vancouver, the government has established strategic initiatives to ensure that Canada has the proper conditions to achieve success in amateur sport.

Canadian take great pride in Canadian successes. That is why Canada's new government has worked with the Canadian Olympic committee, Canadian Paralympic committee and the Vancouver organizing committee for the 2010 Winter Olympic and Paralympic Games to create Podium Canada.

This initiative is aimed at the strategic focus of resources for high performance funding to support Canada's medal count. Through Own the Podium, our government's support for targeted excellence includes $12 million for summer sports and $11 million for winter sports.

Another aspect of our drive for excellence is the athlete assistance program which provides direct tax free grants to 1,700 Canadian high performance athletes each year, assisting them in meeting, training and competitive requirements.

● (2110)

It is clear that we are on the right track to meet our goals. In 2006-07, Canada was second only to Germany on the winter sport World Cup competition circuit. As well, Canada was third at the last Winter Olympics and sixth at the Winter Paralympics in Torino.

Through clear policy initiatives like those I have described, Canada's new government aims to improve on these finishes in 2010.

Our third pillar and major goal is to build capacity for sport across Canada.

This government has put in place an athlete and participant-centred development system in order to strengthen the technical and ethical foundations of sport. We are hosting events to provide important opportunities for athletes to train and compete, as well as to develop the capacities and skills of coaches, technical officials and volunteers.

Each year Canada supports the hosting of over 50 international single sports events such as the 2007 women's world ice hockey championships held in Winnipeg, Manitoba. Our government is also supporting the hosting of the 2007 FIFA men's soccer under-20 world cup in July.

In addition to supporting these exciting events, this government is a major contributor to the Canada Games. This event is an outstanding example of federal, provincial and territorial cooperation, the pinnacle of interprovincial-territorial competition, and a key event for the next generation of Canadian athletes, coaches and leaders.

February 2007 was the 40th anniversary of the Canada Games. To celebrate this achievement, the games were hosted in Whitehorse, Yukon, the first time they had ever been hosted north of the 60th parallel. More than 3,200 athletes competed in 22 sports, with Sport Canada contributing over $37 million to the success of this event.

Canada's new government also recognizes the importance and the contribution of coaches so that Canadian athletes have access to quality, innovative instruction and coaching. Competency based coach education and improving working conditions for coaching are just two ways to strengthen the important role coaches play in sport.

Finally, this government is respected worldwide for its domestic anti-doping program and policies and for its leadership in promoting a drug-free, fair and ethical environment for sport. Our government is pleased that the UNESCO convention against doping in sport, a convention Canada accepted in 2005, entered into force on February 1, 2007.

The last of the four pillars is interaction.

Ultimately, the sport system functions more successfully if the various stakeholders communicate and coordinate with each other. By stressing collaboration and communication, we are always working to improve these relationships.

In order to encourage interaction and communication, we are working with the four Atlantic provinces to launch the Atlantic high performance sport strategy. We have also signed bilateral agreements on sport with all 13 provinces and territories.

We are also working with Health Canada to promote active and healthy lifestyles through our support for SummerActive and WinterActive and through the joint school sport consortium.

In conclusion, Canada's new government has put in place a wide range of successful policies and initiatives, which have resulted in further integration of intergovernmental policies and programs. It has led to increases in funding levels for sport and physical activity. It has also furthered the development of bilateral agreements in each province and territory, which has ensured more sport for all Canadians. Canada's new government has ensured stable funding for national sport organizations, a key for their long term sustainability.

We have the opportunity to build on these accomplishments thanks to an unprecedented level of collaboration between this government and the sport community. This cooperation will significantly strengthen the development of sport, which will directly impact all Canadians throughout Canada and at all levels of participation.

● (2115)

Mr. Ed Fast (Abbotsford, CPC): Mr. Chair, I really appreciate the comments of the Secretary of State. I was especially intrigued by her discussion of athletes, particularly coaches.

Evidence to the contrary, I used to be an athlete. I spent a great deal of time playing hockey, playing softball, fast pitch, and also playing a lot of soccer. One particular individual who was a coach of mine, a manager and indeed a mentor, was a defining influence in my life.

I was really intrigued to hear the Secretary of State talk about how coaches play such a significant role in Canada. Perhaps she could comment on what she sees as the role of coaches and what kind of influence they can have in building the character and self-esteem of our athletes.

Hon. Helena Guergis: First, Mr. Chair, as the Secretary of State for Sport it is my responsibility to report to all members that the Senators are behind 3-2, but my officials tell me that of course we are a third period team and we are sure we are going to be successful.

I thought I saw the member playing soccer with the House pages the other day and I thought he played a pretty good game.

I thank the member for bringing up the issue of coaching and the role that coaches play in the lives of the athletes. I think it is especially important to note the importance of coaching in the lives of our younger athletes and those youths who are just becoming involved in sport or just starting to participate in physical activity.

The role of the coach in today's sport environment goes beyond the teaching of skills and now includes nutrition and overall well-being. A good coach has a tremendous impact on an athlete's outlook on life and on the athlete's attitude in terms of acquiring a healthy sense of competition.

Canada's new government recognizes the importance and the contribution of coaches. Its significant investment in coaches ensures that Canadian athletes have access to quality and innovative instruction in coaching, from learning their sport to achieving the podium.

Competency based coach education and improving working conditions for coaching are of course two ways to strengthen the important role that coaches play.

● (2120)

Mr. Ed Fast: Mr. Chair, I appreciated those comments. I also appreciated the focus of my colleague on the whole issue of fitness. Obviously it is important for us as Canadians to remain fit. It is becoming increasingly more difficult to get Canadians off the couch and into the fitness rooms, the pools and the ice rinks and onto the playing fields.

It is important because our health system benefits when Canadians are fit. Everybody in Canada benefits. Perhaps my colleague could comment on the role of physical fitness and how to get Canadians to participate in activities that are going to make them fit.

Hon. Helena Guergis: Mr. Chair, it certainly is a challenge for us as parliamentarians to keep healthy and active and to be involved in fitness. I know we all give it our best shot, and some may be more successful than others.

I will focus my answer on participaction, because we know that the previous Liberal government actually cancelled the participaction program and it is this government that has restored it with a $5 million contribution. We also see that the media is very much looking forward to participating in participaction again.

I remember how as a young child it was such a benefit for me, living in a rural community and not having a recreation centre to attend, to have a sport class on a regular basis, but I want to point out, too, that we took a long time to do some focus testing to see if people related to participaction. We found out that 78% of all of the young adults aged 30 and up make a connection with participaction, so we believe in relaunching participaction.

I remind the House that of course it was the Liberals who cut that program. I have no idea why they cut it, because it was so absolutely successful.

I think it is important that Canadians relate to and understand what participation in sport can mean for them. Reinvigorating participaction will help us do that across the country.

Mrs. Irene Mathyssen (London—Fanshawe, NDP): Mr. Chair, I am extremely disappointed by how Status of Women has been run by the Conservative government. Every step and every move the government has made has left Canadian women feeling alienated and silenced.

The changes to the funding mandate and the closure of the regional offices have sent shock waves through women's communities, women's rights organizations and women's programs that depend on Status of Women assistance and funding.

What on earth is the rationale for giving more money to a federal agency but taking away its accountability, its integrity and its ability to get to the root problems of women's equality in Canada?

Hon. Bev Oda: Mr. Chair, let me say that I cannot reiterate enough this evening that we believe addressing women and women's needs directly in their daily lives is the most effective way and is going to have a direct impact on improving their future.

I find it ironic that the member is talking about women's rights when it is her party which suggests that we abandon the women in Afghanistan. We have made great strides in improving the situation for women in Afghanistan. They are now, with micro financing, starting their own businesses. The young women are going to school. They have access to medical facilities.

This government will not abandon women in Canada or in Afghanistan.

● (2125)

Mrs. Irene Mathyssen: Mr. Chair, search and kill missions in Afghanistan are hardly helping women.

I would also like to know what is the status of the independent research fund.

Hon. Bev Oda: Mr. Chair, we know that there have been many studies done. The studies are telling us that there are two major issues that must be addressed for Canadian women: violence against women and the economic self-sufficiency of women. That is why we are going to continue working to improve—

The Deputy Chair: The hon. member for London—Fanshawe.

Mrs. Irene Mathyssen: Mr. Chair, I asked what the status is of the policy research fund. What is its status? I would appreciate an answer to my question.

Hon. Bev Oda: Mr. Chair, the policy research fund has been ceased. The research abilities remain within Status of Women Canada and the ability for the research behind the needs of Canadian women will be done with—

The Deputy Chair: The hon. member for London—Fanshawe.

Mrs. Irene Mathyssen: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

You assured me, minister, that the outstanding publication—

The Deputy Chair: This is the second time that the hon. member for London—Fanshawe has referred to the minister in the second person. In the future, I would appreciate her referring in the third person, through the Chair.

The hon. Minister of Canadian Heritage.

Hon. Bev Oda: Mr. Chair, the outstanding policy research fund reports that four reports have been posted at the Status of Women Canada website in recent weeks. Seven more will be posted by the end of June. The nine that are remaining require more work and will not be completed.

Mrs. Irene Mathyssen: Mr. Chair, the funding mandate your government set for the women's program is flawed and ineffective. Have you changed the terms and conditions of the women's program?

Hon. Bev Oda: Mr. Chair, as I announced in September 2006, the terms and conditions have been amended so that the program and the support can more directly impact the lives of communities and women. They are going to support organizations that work day after day to help women in their neighbourhoods and that are going to help women with the greatest need.

Yes, we have amended the terms and conditions to make sure that—

The Deputy Chair: I know that we are in committee of the whole, but the debate is not direct. It is always through the Chair. The hon. member for London—Fanshawe has the floor.

Mrs. Irene Mathyssen: Mr. Chair, two new program announcements by the minister's government have been made. I would like to know when those programs will actually begin.

Hon. Bev Oda: Mr. Chair, we are actually in the last stage of posting the terms and conditions and the necessary guidelines and making available the application forms. Those application forms in fact will be available on the Status of Women website for the first time—

The Deputy Chair: The hon. member for London—Fanshawe.

Mrs. Irene Mathyssen: Mr. Chair, what are the parameters of those new programs?

Hon. Bev Oda: Mr. Chair, as I have indicated previously to this House, there are two programs. There is the women's community fund and the women's partnership fund.

The women's community fund is to support organizations that are working in the community in regard to proposals they put forward that will address the needs.

The partnership fund is there so that non-governmental organizations can work with other levels of government and government agencies to have a larger scope of programs, and the proposal—

The Deputy Chair: The hon. member for London—Fanshawe.

Mrs. Irene Mathyssen: Mr. Chair, I would like to know if a gender based analysis was done on the initial cuts to Status of Women, the changes to the funding mandate, and the decision to close the regional offices.

Hon. Bev Oda: Mr. Chair, let me assure the House that Status of Women is there to assist women and is supported by this government. The programs are directed to assist and support women. We have criteria that say—

● (2130)

The Deputy Chair: The hon. member for London—Fanshawe.

Mrs. Irene Mathyssen: Mr. Chair, I need to know if a gender based analysis was done on these decisions. I need that answer now.

Hon. Bev Oda: Mr. Chair, let me assure the member opposite and all Canadians that this organization and the programs that we put forward are going to affect 100% women.

Mrs. Irene Mathyssen: Mr. Chair, I need to know if gender-based analysis was done in terms of these decisions? I need to know that now.

I want to know how this decision came about and why is there an application that is demanded in terms of assessing these programs using a gender language?

Hon. Bev Oda: Mr. Chair, again, we have a member who is using this valuable time stuck on process. I will assure the House that this is the agency that is now responsible to ensure that gender-based analysis is going to be done in every department. We are going to ensure that we have the resources—

The Deputy Chair: The hon. member for London—Fanshawe.

Mrs. Irene Mathyssen: I am not going to get an answer to this question, Mr. Chair, so I will move on.

With whom in the women's community did you consult when you made—

The Deputy Chair: The hon. member for London—Fanshawe, this is the third time.

Mrs. Irene Mathyssen: Mr. Chair, it is very, very difficult. It is very difficult when the answers are not forthcoming, so I shall repeat.

With whom did the minister consult in making the decision to cut programs and change the mandate of Status of Women?

Hon. Bev Oda: Mr. Chair, I met with women's organizations. I held round tables. I met with women who represent the francophone community and the anglophone community. I met with women right across the country and I also received input from my colleagues who speak to their—

The Deputy Chair: The hon. minister, the hon. member for London—Fanshawe has the floor and no one else.

Mrs. Irene Mathyssen: Mr. Chair, perhaps I will indeed be the minister next time.

According to former regional staff reps and women's organizations, there was no consultation, but I would like to continue. Where is the balance between policy research and program delivery?

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Minister of Canadian Heritage has the floor and no one else.

Hon. Bev Oda: Mr. Chair, I cannot refrain from saying that the possibility of that member or her party forming government is very slim and very dim.

Let me say that we have received the information from the research done. That is why we have been able to meet and identify the two major issues facing women today. The challenges they face—

The Deputy Chair: The hon. member for London—Fanshawe.

Mrs. Irene Mathyssen: Mr. Chair, I would like to know this. Was the decision to shut regional offices and change the mandate the minister's and the minister's alone?

Hon. Bev Oda: Mr. Chair, it was after consultation, after asking the Status of Women staff and their management group, and after consulting with my colleagues and receiving input from cabinet that this government made the—

The Deputy Chair: The hon. member for London—Fanshawe.

Mrs. Irene Mathyssen: Mr. Chair, women's group after women's group, individual after individual, has come to the committee on the Status of Women and indicated that there was no consultation, no analysis of the effects of these closures, and no analysis of the change to the mandate. That is simply not accountable. The government promised accountability. Why is the minister playing politics with women's equality?

Hon. Bev Oda: Mr. Chair, in our consultations and in our consideration of the changes to Status of Women, we decided deliberately not to play politics with women. That is why we are not just addressing organizations and friends of the Liberals, the political partisan views, et cetera. We have listened to everyone.

In fact, there were organizations which under the previous government were never invited to provide input to the government on its women's policies.

● (2135)

Mrs. Irene Mathyssen: Mr. Chair, it would have been nice at this time if women had been invited. I would like to know why the pay equity task force report that said that the complaints-based system does not work and that the measures that the government is currently using have been—

The Deputy Chair: The hon. Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Canadian Heritage is rising on a point of order.

Mr. Jim Abbott: Mr. Chair, again, as I did with my friend from Fredericton, who is an experienced member and this member is not; nonetheless, I believe the Chair would want the member to be asking questions that are relevant to the minister's budget.

Mrs. Irene Mathyssen: Mr. Chair, this is my time and my opportunity to ask questions. I determine what is relevant and what is not.

The Deputy Chair: The hon. member for London—Fanshawe has the floor and I just want to reassure her that the time used by the point of order will not be counted against her.

Mrs. Irene Mathyssen: Mr. Chair, the Pay Equity Task Force reported that the complaints-based system does not work. The measures that the government is currently using have been discredited.

Does the minister believe that women deserve equal pay for work of equal value?

Hon. Bev Oda: Mr. Chair, as the member knows, pay equity is under the responsibility of the Minister of Labour.

However, let me assure the House that we support him in his work. He has now added 100 new inspectors to ensure that the current pay equity laws are being enforced and implemented.

Mrs. Irene Mathyssen: Mr. Chair, it has been thoroughly discredited. I wonder if the minister would then bring forward proactive pay equity legislation.

Hon. Bev Oda: Mr. Chair, as I indicated earlier, the government believes that when we have a law, we enforce the law, and we implement the law. That is our first order of responsibility. That is what we are doing.

I do not understand members opposite when they say that we can have as many laws as we want, but it does not matter if they are implemented or how they are enforced.

Mrs. Irene Mathyssen: Mr. Chair, I would like to know if the minister's department submitted Canada's response to the UN's CEDAW recommendations. If not, why not? They were due in February. When can we expect a response?

Hon. Bev Oda: Mr. Chair, the government responds in a fashion that meets its requirements. Together with the Minister of Foreign Affairs, we are responding to every UN report that we are obligated—

The Deputy Chair: The hon. the member for London—Fanshawe should know there are 40 seconds left for both the question and the answer.

Mrs. Irene Mathyssen: Mr. Chair, it is pretty obvious that there has not been a response.

How is the minister's government ensuring that Canada is complying with general recommendation number six from the CEDAW report?

Hon. Bev Oda: Mr. Chair, as I indicated, the government undertakes its responsibilities.

We have combined the sixth and seventh reports on the convention on the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women, CEDAW, which has been recently submitted to the United Nations.

In fact, we are aware that the ministerial meetings are upcoming. We are also making sure that we are aware of all the other international gatherings that will be coming up.

[*Translation*]

The Deputy Chair: Before giving the floor to the hon. member for Don Valley East, I would like to ask her how she intends to share her time.

[*English*]

Ms. Yasmin Ratansi (Don Valley East, Lib.): Mr. Chair, I will be splitting my time with the members for Desnethé—Missinippi—Churchill River and Madawaska—Restigouche, and we will be asking questions for five minutes.

The Deputy Chair: The member has the first block of five minutes and her two colleagues will each have a block of five minutes.

● (2140)

Ms. Yasmin Ratansi: Mr. Chair, in budget 2007 the minister deleted advocacy from the mandate of Status of Women Canada.

Let me remind the minister that if it were not for the women depicted in the Famous Five statue outside this very building, and the advocacy efforts and demands for equality, women would not have the right to vote and she would not be here.

Why has the minister deleted equality from the mandate?

Hon. Bev Oda: Mr. Chair, we have recognized the work of the Famous Five and in fact we are benefiting from the work they did.

I point out to the House that the Famous Five and the many women who followed them that made major steps in making Canada the great country that it is did not do it based on tax dollars.

Ms. Yasmin Ratansi: Mr. Chair, could the minister advise if the funding as allocated in budget 2007-08 has been disbursed to the Status of Women and if so, when?

Hon. Bev Oda: Mr. Chair, as you know, there is a process by which moneys are forwarded and the requirements will be met. We are receiving applications now under the new terms and conditions and those applications are being reviewed and approvals and announcements are being made.

Ms. Yasmin Ratansi: Mr. Chair, that means no.

Can the minister explain why the new funding guidelines have not yet been posted on her website two months after she announced changes? How can groups apply if they do not know the criteria?

Hon. Bev Oda: Mr. Chair, I will repeat that we are in the final stages of making sure that the guidelines and application forms are going to be available. It will be very soon. In fact, the guidelines and application forms will be available on the website of Status of Women. For the first time they will be accessible.

As I say, that information will be made public imminently.

Ms. Yasmin Ratansi: Mr. Chair, I will give her an easy question.

The Yukon Status of Women Council works with local women's organizations and the Yukon Housing Corporation to advocate for housing on behalf of women fleeing abusive relationships. That means women and children now have an option other than returning to their abusers.

Why does the minister think that cutting advocacy programs will further the lot of women's lives in this country?

Hon. Bev Oda: Mr. Chair, I have to say that we know the difference between advocacy and having supportive organizations that are going to be there for women who are fleeing abusive situations. We are also supporting programs that are going to show them they do have the option of leaving abusive situations.

Advocacy did not make an iota of difference in their lives. Many of them were forced to stay in those situations. Now we have help. They are in the community—

The Chair: The hon. member for Don Valley East.

Ms. Yasmin Ratansi: Mr. Chair, from the responses I have received so far, it appears the minister is totally inept. I will ask her a very simple question.

Women from rural and urban communities and all walks of life appearing before the Standing Committee on the Status of Women have stated that programs have to be looked at through a gender lens. GBA was critical research done by Status of Women to help departments be effective in the program delivery.

Why did the minister gut the research capacity of SWC and why are all her cuts detrimental to women?

Hon. Bev Oda: Mr. Chair, the gender based analysis is totally unrelated to research. We have taken action to ensure that gender based analysis will be done in all the departments. We are making sure that the relationship between Status of Women and the departments is going to be enhanced. The coordinator for the Status of Women is meeting with every deputy minister in every department of this government.

Mr. Gary Merasty (Desnethé—Missinippi—Churchill River, Lib.): Mr. Chair, does the minister believe that the residential school experience nearly destroyed aboriginal languages?

● (2145)

Hon. Bev Oda: Mr. Chair, this government recognizes the serious situation of the aboriginal residential schools and that is why we have acted on—

The Chair: The hon. member for Desnethé—Missinippi—Churchill River.

Mr. Gary Merasty: Does the minister know how many aboriginal languages are near extinction?

Hon. Bev Oda: Mr. Chair, there are three that are near extinction. There are over 50 aboriginal languages.

Mr. Gary Merasty: Mr. Chair, does the minister understand the impact of the loss of these languages to aboriginal cultures and to Canada's proud cultural traditions?

Hon. Bev Oda: Mr. Chair, I would make a correction. Out of 50 aboriginal languages, 3 are viable and the rest are endangered. I recognize how important language is to every culture. It not only enables communication but it reflects on the nature of those rich traditions.

Mr. Gary Merasty: Mr. Chair, maybe I could repeat that question again. Has the minister actually paid any attention to aboriginal languages in cabinet?

Hon. Bev Oda: Mr. Chair, I am pleased to announce that yes we have. I have met with the leadership of the aboriginal communities and we have confirmed $5 million a year to address aboriginal languages for an extended period, to the year 2013-14.

Mr. Gary Merasty: Mr. Chair, can the minister admit that she negligently cut $160 million for aboriginal languages?

Hon. Bev Oda: Mr. Chair, as I indicated, $160 million were put forward to create a centre and there was not unanimous agreement that that should be how moneys should be spent to support aboriginal languages.

Mr. Gary Merasty: Mr. Chair, maybe I will let her expand on that. Why did the minister cut this funding or did she even have a say in it?

Hon. Bev Oda: Mr. Chair, that is typical of the previous government. The Liberals did nothing with the money that was there. They extended the program. They did not move forward on the centre because they knew the aboriginal communities were not in agreement.

Mr. Gary Merasty: Mr. Chair, did the minister redirect this funding to Conservative ridings for cultural events? Was this the botched plan that they were attempting to do with her memo?

Hon. Bev Oda: Mr. Chair, let me assure the member that this government does not act like the previous government by redirecting money to serve its own party purposes.

Mr. Gary Merasty: Mr. Chair, it is clear that the government is prepared to skewer minority languages. We only need to look at the cancelling of the court challenges program, the disrespectful treatment of the francophone language initiatives and the mockery the government has made of the official languages committee.

I guess I should not be surprised at all that the government has done nothing for aboriginal people or to protect aboriginal languages.

I will say this much slower so that the minister has a little more time to answer the question. What is the minister's action plan a year and a half later for protecting aboriginal languages, if she even has one, or does she particularly care?

Hon. Bev Oda: Mr. Chair, when I met with the leadership of the aboriginal communities I asked them to come forward with their plan. The plan has been submitted and we will be reviewing the plan and meeting with them again.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Jean-Claude D'Amours (Madawaska—Restigouche, Lib.): Mr. Chair, since the minister mentioned, a little earlier, that her government respects culture and the arts, could she explain why she is not in a position to help an organization in the Restigouche area, such as Campbellton's Galerie Restigouche, by providing it with some financial assistance?

[*English*]

Hon. Bev Oda: Mr. Chair, we have many programs with clear guidelines and a review process. This is not a government that arbitrarily responds to the requests of individual members of Parliament. The organizations apply to the program. In fact, we deal with 7,000 grant and contribution applications.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Jean-Claude D'Amours: Mr. Chair, the request does not come from a member of Parliament but, rather, from the Galerie Restigouche people.

If the minister really believes in arts and culture, when will she agree to provide financial assistance to these people, so that they can continue their work?

[*English*]

Hon. Bev Oda: Mr. Chair, I indicated that there are programs with guidelines. Once we receive the application it is reviewed and analyzed by the department and the analysis will come to a conclusion.

I certainly commend the member for his organization submitting an application which will be reviewed as all other proposals are.

● (2150)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Jean-Claude D'Amours: Mr. Chair, if there are criteria in place, can the minister explain to the officials of Kedgwick's Sommet de la chanson why volunteers must spend days and days filling in forms, in the hope of getting amounts that barely total $5,000 or $10,000? And then they get a call from the department telling them that even if they fill out the forms, they are not going to get funding.

[*English*]

Hon. Bev Oda: Mr. Chair, unlike the previous government, we do have guidelines. We have application forms. We do not respond in days. When one does respond in days, that is how one gets misdirected funds directly to parties to support riding associations. With due diligence, it does require time. We do not respond in five days.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Jean-Claude D'Amours: Mr. Chair, I am not convinced that the minister listened to my question. In the end, it is the volunteers who have to fill out the forms. However, department officials call the volunteers to tell them that even if they fill out the forms, they are not going to get funding.

Can the minister explain that?

[*English*]

Hon. Bev Oda: Mr. Chair, once again I must point out that we have a proper process. When we took over government we had programs that had no guidelines, had no due process and favoured a political party. We owe it to the Canadian taxpayers to ensure their money is being used responsibly and it is going to the organizations—

The Chair: The hon. member for Madawaska—Restigouche.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Jean-Claude D'Amours: Mr. Chair, from what I understand, the minister is saying that the money that could be invested in Kedgwick's Sommet de la chanson would not be properly spent. That is unacceptable.

Moreover, we know that Edmundston's jazz and blues festival is a bilingual and francophone event that will take place in June, in the Madawaska region. The department says that this event does not really meet the program's objectives. It was just cut as a program for student employment. According to the department, there is not a clearly established need.

Why does the minister not provide adequate funding to this organization?

[*English*]

Hon. Bev Oda: Mr. Chair, it may have been the experience of the member opposite that he could talk to a minister and get a commitment for funding immediately but that is not how this government works. As I said, we have programs, clear guidelines and an application process.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Jean-Claude D'Amours: Mr. Chair, at least when there was a different government, we were in a position to help organizations and volunteers.

Why does the minister not want to help an organization when it is suffering from cuts to student programs and it needs financial help?

Why does this government not want to help organizations and communities? Is it because they are in a francophone region?

[*English*]

Hon. Bev Oda: Mr. Chair, as I said, we do have community organizations. The Status of Women program goes directly to community organizations and our volunteer approach is to support organizations that have volunteers who are doing good work in the community.

I do not understand how the member can talk about not helping organizations when the one organization—

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Order, please. The hon. member for Madawaska—Restigouche for one final question.

Mr. Jean-Claude D'Amours: Mr. Chair, I can appreciate that the minister understands nothing. But the only thing I am trying to make her understand is that it is an organization that was refused funding for student programs and that was told by the Heritage Minister that it did not need this funding. It needs help.

If the minister does not understand, perhaps I should slow down to make translation easier? Is it because it is a francophone region that the minister does not want to give funding to the Edmunston Jazz and Blues Festival?

[*English*]

Hon. Bev Oda: Mr. Chair, with my colleague, the Minister for la Francophonie and Official Languages, we have indicated that we have programs that are helping organizations in the community, students in the community and community centres in the community.

All I can say is that one must look at the work government wide. We are doing it in many departments. Our support for communities is there.

The Chair: We will now begin a 15 minute government round with the hon. member for Kildonan—St. Paul.

Mrs. Joy Smith (Kildonan—St. Paul, CPC): Mr. Chair, it is a pleasure to speak in the House to the issue of women in Canada.

Canada's new government has taken concrete action to increase women's participation in the economic, social and cultural life of Canada and to eliminate systemic violence against women and their families.

It is important to be clear on the recent changes Canada's new government has made to Status of Women Canada.

Status of Women Canada was established in 1976. After three decades, this government has stepped in to modernize the departmental agency through a number of important changes.

Canada's new government was elected because of its promise to deliver value for taxpayer dollars. This promise is being kept. Programs are being reviewed to ensure every taxpayer dollar is spent to achieve results that benefit Canadians. Government waste is being eliminated and reinvested in programs for people.

With this new approach, $5 million in administrative savings has been identified at Status of Women Canada. An independent evaluation of the women's program had previously discovered that it took 31¢ in administration and overhead to deliver one program dollar. This was unfair to both the women who required services and Canadian taxpayers. That is why our government has reduced overhead, closed some offices and rededicated the savings to better assist Canadian women. We have retained four regional Status of Women offices to provide the needed support to women across Canada.

All of the savings were set aside for reinvestment and delivering support directly to Canadian women. The $10.8 million annual budget previously allocated to women's program is entirely maintained. This will result in more money to support women in their communities.

We have renewed the terms and conditions of the women's program with more focused objectives to achieve the full participation of women in the economic, social and cultural life of Canada. The projects that will be supported will directly assist women in their communities on local, regional and national levels.

Under Canada's new government, the women's program will now be focused on eliminating violence against women and enhancing the economic well-being of aboriginal, senior, immigrant and visible minority women.

Rather than conducting more studies and more research, this government has made a commitment to take real action.

For the first time, Status of Women Canada will increase accessibility by making funding applications available online to organizations that undertake projects to benefit women directly. The beneficiaries of this change will be Canadian women so that they will be able to meet challenges and more fully participate in the social and economic life of Canada.

Canada's new government is proud to enhance the women's program in order to make a real difference in the lives of Canadian women who are facing challenges.

On March 7, the Minister of Canadian Heritage and Status of Women announced an additional $5 million in new funding toward Status of Women Canada for 2007-08 and a new funding mechanism for the women's program. This increase brings the total budget for the women's program from $10.8 million to $15.3 million, the largest budget in the history of Status of Women Canada.

The new funding mechanism provides an important leveraging and partnership aspect that has never been done before. This means more money and more projects aimed directly at helping women in their communities in an accountable and efficient manner.

As of April 1, the women's program has two components: the women's community fund and the women's partnership fund. The women's community fund will support projects at a local, regional and national level in order to enable the full participation of women in all aspects of Canadian life.

The newly created women's partnership fund is an enhancement to the existing grant program and will facilitate the engagement of eligible organizations and public institutions through joint projects designed to address issues pertaining to women. The additional funds will be used strategically to leverage resources from these sources.

With these new means, the women's program will also be able to respond better to the growing demand for financial assistance in addressing the economic, social and cultural situation of women.

● (2155)

It is important to highlight what Canada's new government has done to improve the quality of life for women across this country and to reflect on the challenges ahead.

Canada's new government is committed to concrete action that will benefit Canadian women and make a real difference in their lives. That is why on April 27, 2007 this government announced funding of $26,855 to the British Columbia Coalition of People with Disabilities. Their project, Succession Strategy for Younger Women in the Disability Community, will promote volunteerism and mentorship for young women with disabilities in the B.C. disability community.

On April 11, 2007, this government announced funding of $50,000 to the Golden Women's Centre Society for a project designed to improve access to employment information and support for 100 rural women, half of whom are immigrant or aboriginal. The project, Putting Women on the Payroll, will also seek practical solutions for employers to make their workplaces safer and more flexible. This grant was among the first to be provided by Canada's new government under the renewed women's program at Status of Women.

On February 8, 2007, this government announced funding of $49,140 to Prince George New Hope Society, the first grant to be provided through the renewed women's program at Status of Women Canada. This funding will help sex trade workers start new lives by providing refuge and training opportunities.

Canada's new government is proud to support this initiative which is taking concrete actions to help directly sex workers and sexually exploited young women, particularly young aboriginal women, with the safety, hope and tools to come off the streets. This is just another example of the meaningful contributions this government is making to improve the situation of women in key areas such as women's economic status and violence against women and girls. This was the first grant to be provided by Canada's new government under the new terms and conditions and new guidelines of the women's program at Status of Women Canada.

It is very exciting. This government is seeing a positive response as organizations from all across the country are coming forward with projects that directly benefit women in their communities. This demonstrates that there is a desire for concrete action from Canadians to make a difference in the lives of women who face challenges.

Canada's aboriginal women and their children presently experience greater incidences of violence in all forms. Through community-based initiatives that incorporate aboriginal traditions, teachings and support, we will reach that day when violence exists no longer. That is why Canada's new government believes in supporting programs that have a direct impact on women. We believe in putting money into the hands of groups that will help aboriginal women in their communities.

In October 2005, Canada was cited by the United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women for failing to adequately address the high rate of violence against aboriginal women. That is why this government committed multi-year funding of $1 million a year through to fiscal year 2010-11 to the Native Women's Association of Canada. The Sisters in Spirit initiative addresses the high rates of violence against aboriginal women. This is the same project from which the Liberal government withheld promised funding for years.

Our government believes in a promise made, a promise kept.

On April 13, 2007, I had the privilege of announcing funding of $165,000 to the Crossing Communities Art Project Inc., a registered charity aimed at developing art projects and networks by mentoring women and girls who are in a marginalized position. Crossing Communities achieves its goals through studios and workshops that employ visual expression in ways that help women and girls to heal in the aftermath of trauma and violence.

On March 8, 2007, this government also announced that Canada's new government would provide $20,000 in funding for the La Ronge Native Women's Council. These funds will enable the council to organize a cultural camp with workshops and activities.

On March 8, 2007, this government announced funding of $19,140 for the Anishinaabe Kweg Research Project. The goal of the project is to study traditional aboriginal healing methods in the treatment of issues such as family violence, mental health, substance abuse and grief.

On February 23, 2007, this government announced $29,884 in funding to the Women of the Dawn Counselling Centre. These funds will support the centre's hope for non-violence project.

● (2200)

Another horrific issue that affects women here in Canada and abroad is human trafficking. As we learn more about the nature and incidents of human trafficking around the world, it is clear that the priority given to combating this crime is warranted.

The International Labour Organization has estimated that at any given time approximately 2.45 million people are in situations of forced labour as a result of human trafficking. This is a staggering number. This is why I am proud of this government that provided $6 million in funding to protect children from online sexual exploitation.

Strong laws are only as good as the ability to effectively enforce them. That is why I am pleased to note that the federal government continues to support the implementation of these offences through training and awareness building across Canada.

This government will continue to ensure we are making a difference in the lives of women. This is our commitment and, as we have shown time and again, a promise made is a promise kept.

● (2205)

Mrs. Patricia Davidson (Sarnia—Lambton, CPC): Mr. Chair, I thank the hon. member for her clear commitment to the modernization of the Status of Women Canada. Her dedication is evident and admirable.

I listened with interest to the hon. member's description of a project in her riding called Crossing Communities Art Project Inc. The project sounds like it achieves the kind of direct impact that the Minister of Canadian Heritage and Status of Women intended the new women's program to achieve.

Could the hon. member elaborate on the importance of boosting the confidence and self-esteem of women and girls? In her opinion, could she tell the House why we should be providing funding to projects such as this one?

Mrs. Lynne Yelich (Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister of Human Resources and Social Development, CPC): Mr. Chair, recently our government was pleased to support single women and motherhood training program in London. The project will help single mothers in the London community to fully participate in the economic life by increasing the availability of access to education and employment opportunities.

Another example of projects that we support is the Crossing Communities Art Project in Winnipeg which will engage up to 30 aboriginal and visible minority girls and women who have or are at risk of being in conflict with the law. The project offers an art mentorship to help boost confidence and social and economic well-being for these women. They will participate in studio workshops and training sessions twice weekly in order to develop skills in film and video ,as well as more effective interpersonal communication presentation skills.

Our government is also introducing an exciting new funding mechanism, the women's partnership fund. The new funding program will address issues pertaining to women by encouraging organizations and other levels of government to work in partnership supporting projects directly related to assisting women in their daily lives.

Mrs. Patricia Davidson: Mr. Chair, I thank the hon. member for her dedication to directly helping women in the community. I listened with interest to the hon. member and her passion to protect women and children from human trafficking.

I am also proud that the government has provided $6 million in funding to protect children from on-line sexual exploitation and to assist investigators in suspected cases of human trafficking.

The member also mentioned the importance of training front line officials on the new human trafficking offences. I strongly believe in properly equipping our law enforcement officers with the tools necessary so they can do their jobs to the best of their abilities.

I have a specific question on human trafficking. Could the hon. member elaborate as to what other actions the government has taken to help victims to ensure they are treated as victims and not criminals?

Hon. Bev Oda: Mr. Chair, the first thing is that we do regard these women as victims and that is why we introduced the 120 day access to the needed health care that they will need and the needed support systems that they will need as well.

We do not see that these women should continually be victimized. They should not be considered criminals. They are the victims and in fact it distresses me that these victims come from many countries around the word but we also have victims of human trafficking here in Canada. Many Canadians are not aware of that and that is why we are taking these kinds of actions.

● (2210)

[*Translation*]

Mr. Richard Nadeau (Gatineau, BQ): Mr. Speaker, my colleagues have eloquently demonstrated that the Conservatives do not wish to hear opposition voices. The Conservatives have cut funding for women's advocacy groups and are hindering the development of cultural expression.

One powerful example of what my colleagues are talking about is the court challenges program, which the Conservatives abolished and which made it possible to defend those who initiated charter challenges of government decisions. Women, as well as minority linguistic communities, often used this program. However, the Conservative government does not like to be contradicted. It is anathema to them.

The court challenges program was abolished because, according to the Prime Minister, the government does not need to pay lawyers. Community groups disagreed, went to court and then what did the government do? It paid its lawyers in order not to pay others. We must admit, that is quite something.

The Commissioner of Official Languages was right to take the government to task over this decision. All the reasons given by the government still leave us scratching our heads. Why would the government take issue with the fact that groups want to defend their interests under the charter? Why does the government have a problem with its decisions being challenged? It is a question of ideology.

The government would prefer that the Standing Committee on Official Languages not sit rather than allow it to study the court challenges program. This government does not like democracy. It puts up with it, but it would prefer to do without. It would like to do as it pleases. It is a minority government right now, but just imagine if it were a majority government.

Francophone minorities, official languages and so on are problematic. They are not a priority. The armed forces transformation model is another example that speaks volumes, as are the appointments of unilingual senior public officials and the decision to appoint a unilingual anglophone as Minister of Canadian Heritage. We know she was taking French classes, but we also know that she is totally disconnected from the real lives of francophones and Quebeckers.

Clearly, when it comes to official languages and protecting francophone minorities, this government is more of a hindrance than a help. The Prime Minister can start as many speeches as he wants to in French, but we will not forget that in 2001, in the language of Preston Manning, he said this:

[*English*]

> As a religion, bilingualism is the god that failed. It has led to no fairness, produced no unity and cost Canadian taxpayers untold millions.

[*Translation*]

He is not in a good position to be teaching Justin Trudeau a lesson, even though Justin Trudeau is scarcely any better. It is absolutely clear that for the Conservatives, bilingualism is an expense. Communities have every reason to be concerned. It is time to remind this government—which wants to reduce the proportion of francophones in this House by increasing the number of seats for Ontario and Alberta but not for Quebec—of the importance of communities to the future of Quebec and Canada.

My question is for the minister. Does she agree with what the Prime Minister said in 2001, that "bilingualism is the god that failed, that it has done nothing for unity or fairness and has cost Canadian taxpayers millions"?

Hon. Josée Verner (Minister of International Cooperation and Minister for la Francophonie and Official Languages, CPC): Mr. Speaker, as a francophone and a Quebecker, I certainly heard the most astounding things in the speech given by the hon. member from the Bloc Québécois.

I would simply like to remind him that our government is committed to promoting linguistic duality in Canada. Our government believes that two official languages can survive side by side in our country. However, I know the objective of the Bloc Québécois and the Parti Québécois, who seem to believe that, with repeated referendums, they will one day create a country in which French will be the only language used. Francophone communities and the Canadian francophonie deserve more than such a stunted view of the French fact.

Since the member seems to enjoy recalling previous comments, I would like to remind him that, back when relations between the Parti Québécois and the Bloc Québécois seemed to be a little better, André Boisclair, the new leader, said that the francophonie was limited to Quebec. Today, the hon. member is trying to teach me a lesson about the francophonie across Canada. I do not accept it.

● (2215)

Mr. Richard Nadeau: Mr. Speaker, the minister should know that my roots are Franco-Ontarian and that I fought in Saskatchewan to revive the French schools that had been abolished in 1931 by the Conservative government of James Anderson. The schools were reinstated in 1995, after 64 years of fighting by Franco-Saskatchewanians. If the hon. minister would like to know what it means to be a minority francophone, she need only ask. She has much to learn on the subject.

Furthermore, I would like to ask her another question. Does she agree with the Commissioner of Official Languages, who said that her government violated the Official Languages Act by eliminating the court challenges program?

Hon. Josée Verner: Mr. Chair, as the member is well aware, I cannot comment on this because it is before the courts.

However, since he raised the issue of Canada's francophone community, I would like to know how it feels to him, as a Franco-Ontarian, to have chosen his country, as he said one time when I appeared before the Standing Committee on Official Languages.

I, too, have chosen my country. My country includes all francophones, even those who live outside Quebec. He is free to choose, but I would like to know how, as a Franco-Ontarian who has chosen Quebec, he can claim today to be defending francophones outside Quebec.

Mr. Richard Nadeau: Mr. Chair, I will tell the minister and her colleagues that Quebec was part of North America long before 1867, when the Dominion of Canada was created. Canada became a sovereign nation in 1931 with the Statute of Westminster. Still, even though Quebec was part of Canada, that did not prevent the provinces, with the federal government's approval, from abolishing our schools, abolishing our services and even going so far as to try and close the Montfort Hospital. This government had a sister party in Ontario, the party of Mike Harris, who wanted to close the only French-language hospital west of Quebec, a hospital that was working well and providing excellent service for the community.

Canada's francophonie needs to understand this: for Quebeckers and all francophones, in order to combat the rampant assimilation that has been under way since 1951, the only thing that has not yet been tried is the creation of a French-language country neighbouring Canada within North America.

I would like to ask the minister another question. Does she agree with the Commissioner of Official Languages, who says that in abolishing the court challenges program, the government did not take into account the needs of minority communities, as the Official Languages Act requires?

Hon. Josée Verner: Mr. Chair, I will repeat—in French—that since the issue is before the courts, I cannot comment on it.

The hon. member talked at length about the struggles of francophones in this country. We acknowledge the vitality of francophone minority communities. I have visited each and every one of these groups over the past year, and they can certainly be proud of the battles they have fought and the gains they have made. Our government is committed to promoting linguistic duality in our country.

The problem with the Bloc member is that he wants just one official language for Quebec, but bilingualism outside that province.

● (2220)

Mr. Richard Nadeau: Mr. Chair, the minister should really think further. Against whom did my Franco-Ontarian parents, now 86 and 89 years old, do battle? They were prevented from studying in French by Regulation 17. In Ontario, French schools were abolished in their early days, when they were mere toddlers. My sisters did not get the chance to study in French in high school because there were no French high schools before 1968. I was the first in my family to be able to go to a French high school. That is what I call vision. As soon as a community starts to disappear due to assimilation, it starts getting what it should have been given 100 years earlier.

The battles for the French fact were not fought by the federal or provincial governments, but rather by the communities. They were fought in spite of all the efforts of the enemy—that is the provincial governments—to try and choke us, while the federal government watched with an approving eye, without doing a thing to help us.

I would like to know what the minister thinks of the president of SOS Montfort at the time, Gisèle Lalonde. She will be our guest tomorrow, at the advisory committee of opposition parties on official languages. She will speak to us about the battle fought by SOS Montfort. SOS Montfort won the battle against the Government of Ontario while the federal government watched approvingly, without doing anything to help the hospital survive.

What does she think of a person like that, who maintains that the court challenges program is necessary and should be restored?

Hon. Josée Verner: Mr. Speaker, in order to help the Canadian francophonie, one must want to work in Canada as a whole. The truth is that the Bloc member cannot ignore the fact that for the years during which Quebec was ruled by the PQ, Quebec did not participate in the Ministerial Conference on Canadian Francophonie. How can the Bloc think that it can help the Canadian francophonie if it does not even take its seat at the table? How can the Bloc think that it can help promote this country's linguistic duality from its seat on the sidelines?

We must promote the Canadian francophonie within Canada. We have taken real measures since coming to power: service delivery and education agreements with all of the provinces, territories and communities. Various initiatives have been put forward, including an immigration program designed to promote immigration to francophone communities.

That is how we will continue to stimulate the Canadian francophonie and the vitality of Canada's francophone communities.

Mr. Richard Nadeau: Mr. Chair, I would like to point out to the minister, who likes pulling out examples from here and there, that this is nothing but smoke and mirrors. In the case of Franco-Albertan schools, it is thanks to the court challenges program that we were able to win our battle in Alberta to get back our schools that had been abolished ages ago.

It was the Liberal government of Robert Bourassa in Quebec that spoke out against Franco-Albertan school management, while the Parti Québécois has always supported francophones in minority situations, by never speaking out against their battle. I will go even further. In the Mercure case in Saskatchewan, in 1988, the Supreme Court of Canada told the Government of Saskatchewan that, since the province had to be bilingual, the government would have to draft legislation in French and English establishing the province as unilingual English to avoid any problem. That is Canada's vision for bilingualism, for communities that are fighting so hard.

The minister realizes that communities are fighting. Who are they fighting against? Against the federal government and the provinces. It is outrageous. That is Canada and it does not respect francophone minorities, especially as we can see now with the—

● (2225)

[*English*]

The Chair: Order. I am sorry, but the hon. member has used up all his time including any time that might have been available for a response.

We will move now to the final round. The member for London North Centre.

Mr. Glen Pearson: Mr. Chair, I will be splitting my time with the members for Humber—St. Barbe—Baie Verte and Vancouver Centre, who will be asking questions for five minutes each.

The Chair: Order. I wonder if members on this side could just be a little more quiet so I could hear what the member for London North Centre has to say and so maybe the minister could hear it as well. I might also say to the member this will not come out of his time. There are not 15 minutes left, there are only five minutes left, so he probably will not be sharing his time with anybody. He is it. The hon. member for London North Centre.

Mr. Glen Pearson (London North Centre, Lib.): Mr. Chair, in the charitable work I have done over the years many people have expressed some grievance at the fact that the word "equality" has been taken out from the Status of Women. I wonder, if the minister were meeting with those women, as I have done, what she would say to them on that subject.

Hon. Bev Oda: Mr. Chair, certainly with respect to the immigrant women's associations and visible minority communities, I have spent 30 years in my professional career working with immigrant women, working with ethnic communities to understand what their communications issues are and what their lives are all about.

We are addressing that, but not just through advocacy and listening to just advocates. We are doing it right across this government. That is why we have increased our funding for immigrant settlement homes.

Mr. Glen Pearson: Mr. Chair, for Canada's own foreign aid and development policy, women's advocacy is one of the key things that we tried to fund in the various things that we do. I know that we have done that in Africa in the past.

I am trying to figure out how we square that circle between being able to do that as part of our foreign policy, but yet in our domestic policy in Canada, we have taken out that ability to advocate.

How can the minister balance those two things? Why do we say one thing to the world and we practise another thing here?

Hon. Bev Oda: Mr. Chair, advocacy is a practice that any organization, any individual and any citizen in Canada can do and they have elected members of Parliament who should be listening to the women and the citizens. We understand and acknowledge the situation in foreign countries and that is why we are there. We are helping the political system to grow and develop in Afghanistan. We are doing that type of work right around the world.

Hon. Gerry Byrne (Humber—St. Barbe—Baie Verte, Lib.): Mr. Chair, a crisis is brewing throughout Canada. Over 100 cultural, historic, theatre arts organizations and sporting organizations in my riding alone will be shutting down in the next several weeks as a result of cuts to the student job creation program. Organizations like the Dorset Eskimo Museum will be shutting down. I want to know—

The Chair: There is a point of order. I am recognizing someone on a point of order. Keep an eye on the Chair.

Mr. Jim Abbott: Mr. Chair, I rise on a point of order regarding relevancy. I believe that the member would want to ask questions that relate directly to the minister's portfolio.

The Chair: As far as I am concerned, the questions are in order, but I would ask the hon. members on this side to please be quiet while the member is talking.

Hon. Gerry Byrne: Mr. Chair, there is a question of relevancy on that side and they are not standing up for the arts community, for sporting events, for other organizations. In two weeks' time, several organizations will be shutting down right across the country.

I want to ask the minister a very specific question. Is there a contingency plan in place to deal with sport, history, culture, everything under her portfolio that it is her responsibility to deal with? Does she have a contingency plan? I do not want to hear an answer that she will work with stakeholder groups. With what will happen in 14 days' time, does she have a contingency plan in place, yes or no?

● (2230)

Hon. Helena Guergis (Secretary of State (Foreign Affairs and International Trade) (Sport), CPC): Mr. Chair, the hon. member might want to do his research and identify that I am the minister to answer those questions.

We give $140 million a year to sport in this country. We put over $37 million into the Canada Winter Games in Whitehorse which was a tremendous success. We put $5 million into Participaction which the previous Liberal government cut. In addition to that, there is $160 million in the children's fitness tax credit which has been in effect since January 1.

With respect to heritage, we made an announcement in the budget. We will be providing funding to heritage sports so that Canadians can celebrate their heritage.

The Chair: Order, please. For the information of the House, I said at the beginning that the time I took to explain the rules of the evening would not be deducted from the evening. That means we have about another four minutes to go.

The hon. member for Humber—St. Barbe—Baie Verte.

Hon. Gerry Byrne: Mr. Chair, let the record show not one reference was made to one organization in Newfoundland and Labrador, which is where this member comes from and where my constituents have their concerns.

I want to point out that the Corner Brook Museum & Archives, the Grand Falls-Windsor Heritage Society Inc., the Nurse Myra Bennett Foundation, the Bonne Bay Cottage Hospital Museum and the Dr. Henry N. Payne Community Museum are all shutting in 14 days unless there is specific action by the government.

The government has failed us. It has failed our culture. It has failed our history. Will it fail the people of Canada? Has there been a decision by the Department of Canadian Heritage to put in place a contingency program, and no dialogue or rhetoric about whether it will talk to the stakeholders? In fourteen days they will be shutting down. Is there a plan in place, yes or no?

Hon. Bev Oda: Mr. Chair, this is not a government of just talk and dialogue. We put $5 million more into student apprenticeships in museums. Every museum in Canada is able to access and apply for that program whether they come from Newfoundland and Labrador, the north, B.C. or Prince Edward Island.

This is the government that did not just talk about it. We put the money in the budget. Why did the member and his party vote against that budget?

Hon. Gerry Byrne: Mr. Chair, I want to share my time remaining with my hon. colleague from Vancouver, but I will ask this question again.

There have been hundreds of thousands of dollars ripped out of community based not for profit volunteer organizations. The people of Canada want to know this. Will hundreds of organizations involved in sport, in culture, in history and interpretation of the wonders and splendours of our country shut down on this minister's watch as a result of the government's decisions to cut the student employment program, or does the minister have in place a contingency program, yes or no?

Hon. Bev Oda: Mr. Chair, the answer does not change no matter how loud the voices.

As the Minister of Canadian Heritage, we have put $5 million more to assist student apprenticeships at museums and organizations. The student summer works program will help students find really good meaningful jobs in areas of low unemployment. The students we are targeting are those students most in need.

Hon. Hedy Fry: Mr. Chair, the Secretary of State for Sport spoke highly of the athletes' assistance program, which gave a record number of medals at the Turin games, a program which was funded by the last Liberal government.

Now, the athletes who want to go to Beijing want to win medals too. They are waiting for the government to put its commitment into a $30 million fund for which they have been begging.

When will the government commit itself to high performance athletes and not continue to feed off the Liberal fund that we put into it?

Hon. Helena Guergis: Mr. Chair, I point out that the Government of Canada gives $63 million a year to our summer athletes. We give $18 million directly to the summer athletes, and this is helping them prepare for Beijing.

I will also talk about the 34 summer national sports organizations that receive money from the Government of Canada. Let us also talk about the On the Podium program because we are working toward—

● (2235)

The Chair: Order, please. If I could have the House's attention for minute, I might actually bring this to an end.

It being 10:35 p.m., pursuant to Standing Order 81(4) all votes are deemed reported. The committee will rise and I will now leave the chair.

The Deputy Speaker: The House stands adjourned until tomorrow at 10 a.m., pursuant to Standing Order 24(1).

(The House adjourned at 10:37 p.m.)

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